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

**10. APT TO TEACH by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Apt to Teach."*

*2 Timothy 2:24*

"APT TO TEACH." How exquisitely this sentence is placed! On the one hand there is the grace of "gentleness." On the other hand there is the grace of "patience." It is an aptitude resting in the embrace of two lovely dispositions. Or, if I may change the figure, it is a strong and graceful flower fed by two conspicuous roots. Where do the roots gather their provision? The aptitude to teach rises out of the twin dispositions of gentleness and patience: where do these obtain their resources? We must search down through the many layers of the chapter to its beginning, and we shall find the object of our search in the suggestive words, -- "Strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." That is the primal resource. From that we rise through the ministries of divine fellowship, and hallowed remembrance, and consecrated toil, up to the Christian dispositions of gentleness and patience, and to the crowning aptitude of being empowered to communicate one's experience to others. Such is the setting of the clause. Now let us give this particular aptitude a little more detailed inspection, and mark the conditions of its spiritual attainment. "The servant of the Lord must be ... apt to teach." What are the implications of this aptitude.

**I. -- The Teacher must have a Message**

Have I got anything worth telling? Do I regard anything I have to say as of infinite moment? Is it a matter of life and death to anybody? Is it worth anybody's while coming across the street to listen? Have I got a clear evangel, and if so, what do I consider the very marrow of the message? I want to force the teachers to face these most searching and revealing questions. What are our "good tidings"? Suppose we were face to face with a crowd of children who had to learn all that they would know about the unseen from our lips, and suppose that we were permitted only one short lesson in which to make the revelation, what would be the burden of our speech? Are we clear about this? Are we careless, slovenly, sleepy trumpeters, or do we sound clear, definite, resounding notes? Surely our message would all gather round about the Christ, and surely the emphasis of the message would be found in the proclamation of truths like these: -- Jesus loves; Jesus saves; Jesus keeps. Jesus loves! It is an exquisite experience to watch the face of a little child when even the rudimentary elements of this glorious truth break upon his mind and heart. It is one of the sweetest moments in life to tell that story into the ears of a little child who listens to it for the first time. Jesus saves! He saves from sin, from moral infirmity; from spiritual stagnation; from spiritual death. Jesus keeps! He not only keeps us as we protect the candle flame from the rude wind that would blow it out; He keeps us as we protect a flower, nourishing and cherishing it unto unfoldings of ever-deepening beauty, and maturing it into the stage of ultimate perfection. The teacher whose teaching is to be eternally fruitful must have a message that never loses communion with these all-vital beginnings.

**II. -- The Teacher must have an Experience**

What do I know about my message? Can I defend and confirm it by illustrations from my own life? How do I present the truth? There are at least four ways in which I may present it and they mark a gradation of deepening impressiveness and effectiveness. I can present truth as an abstraction. I can present it embodied in a parable, a story, or a fairy tale. I can present it enshrined in a work of art. I can present it incarnated in a life. Experiment with these four methods upon a company of little children. The first method will leave them listless and indifferent. The second method will awake their interest, and their minds will be all alert. The third method will intensify their inquisitiveness, and awake their wonder. The fourth method, the presentation of a living man in whom the truth is incarnate, say the grace of courage, will make their souls bend in reverence, and in appropriating homage and love.

Do I as a teacher incarnate my message? Have I lived it? Can I say to the children: "Come hither, and I will declare what the Lord hath done for my soul." It is the personal "Apt to Teach" element in the teachings of the Apostle Paul that makes his teaching so overwhelmingly forceful. Even in the most argumentative and controversial epistle the personal experience is obtruded in defence and confirmation of the truth. He has a mighty sense of redemption, and he has an equally profound sense of the all-prevailing presence and tenderness of God. It is no wonder that there emerges from this man's life such a confident "I know!" That is the tone of the real teacher. Can I speak with such assurance? Have I any experience to corroborate my evangel? What can I tell the scholars about the forgiveness of sins? What do I know about it? What can I tell them about the surrender of the will, of the holy fellowship of prayer, and the power of the Spirit as He operates in the strong control of the life. What can I tell them about "the joy of the Lord," and the "peace that passeth understanding?" Anyone who is to be "apt to teach" must have a life which illustrates his own message.

**III. -- The Teacher must have a Mission**

What is this mission? When I go to my class, what is my aim? Is my purpose as clear as a bell? The common reply would be: "My purpose is to bring the scholars to Jesus, to incline them to give their hearts to Him." But have we a clear conception of the meaning of these words, or is our purpose lost in apparent vagueness? I listened to a Christian worker who had been taking part in a certain service for children, and he exultantly expressed himself in this way: "We had a grand time, the children were crying all over the room." That may not be an issue of which to make much boast. I am not quite sure that we need make little children cry. I want them to fall in love with Christ, and to fall in love is to leap into joy, and laughter will be a finer expression than tears. We want some clear thinking about this matter of bringing children to Christ. I would that all our teachers had some elementary system of pyschology. We need to know something about the constituents of the inner life, and especially about the workings of the will. The laying down of the will is the secret of Christian discipleship, and will inevitably issue in eternal glory.

For the adequate discharge of this mission the teacher needs three things. He needs thought. For effective teaching we require hard, honest thinking. Teachers never had more helps than they have to-day. Can we add to this that they were never more thoughtful? I am sometimes afraid that the multitudinous helps are crushing the individuality out of our teachers, that we are losing the worth of their original endowment. Our teachers ought to be as distinct in their individualities as the violin, trumpet, and harp. Let our teachers use their helps as material for thought, and not as substitutes for it. Then the teacher needs force. All the current of the life must set in one direction. Teaching, like preaching, should be not only a work, but a hobby; not only a sacrifice, but a delight. If there be no joy in the teaching, the speech will be forceless, and force less speech is of all things most impotent. In the life of the successful teacher all the little tributaries of his days are made to converge in his one supreme and central purpose. Then, finally, the teacher needs persuasiveness. For an interpretation of this word we can go back to the lovely dispositions which surround my text, the twin graces of gentleness and patience. These two words, "gentle" and "patience," almost describe the characteristics of an angler. How patient is the angler in studying the river and the fish, and how exquisitely gentle is his throw! Both elements are needed in the constitution of the ideal teacher. He must be gentle, genial, wooing; and he must be patient, holding out through long seasons, and never yielding to despair.