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

**16. WHAT I WOULD IF I COULD by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Some would have taken Him, but ... ."*

*John 7:44*

IF the opportunity had been favourable, they would have taken Him. They were in the mood for it. Their inclinations were formed. Their purpose was set. In spirit everything was ready, but the opportunity did not serve. What was the difference between these men and those who eventually perfected their desire and carried it out? Is there any difference in temperament, in purpose, in moral colour and constitution? Is there any difference in soul? No, the difference is only in the opportunity. There is no difference between the Guy Fawkes who lays his powder barrels and fires them, and the Guy Fawkes who lays his powder barrels but is prevented from firing. Guy Fawkes does not become virtuous because his programme was not accomplished. He remains the same. He would have been no worse if his designs had been attained. Spiritually he did the deed. It was only an unexpected antagonism which pre vented the visible achievement.

"Some would have taken Him, but ..." If they had had the opportunity, they would have done it. See, then, opportunity, does not create character, but only reveals it. Opportunity makes patent what has hitherto been latent. The taking of the Master would not have rendered these men vicious or malicious; it would only have declared their device.

Out of this there arises a very clear and all-important principle. What we would be, if opportunity presented, that we are. Our "would-bes" are the truest index of our character. A murderous hand may be stricken aside; that makes the man no less a murderer. Everything relating to murder was present, except the opportunity. What would the stuff within me make, if opportunity presented to me the circumstances of a Cain? Are my dispositions such that I should repeat his act? What I would be in certain conditions that I am. The absence of fulfilment affords no proof of the presence of virtue or vice. That the chained dog cannot get at me does not prove him virtuous. He would, if he could. The biting would not create his vice; he is vicious; the venom is in him. My safety is only consequent upon his inability. I am not obligated to his temper; I am in debt to his chain. The inclination is there; the fulfilment is prevented. The character of the dog is to be found in the nature of his inclination. What we would do, that, in the sight of God, we have done. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

Let us take the light of this principle and carry it round about common life. Let us give another application to our text. "Some of them would have sold the margarine for butter, but ..." Then in the sight of God they have done it. Sin that is uncommitted for fear of discovery is in reality done. A man who would label his margarine "butter," but who refrains for fear of the inspector, is essentially bad at the heart. Badness of this kind will find an outlet somewhere. Sewer gas continually seeks for an exit. Supposing one man has labelled his margarine "butter," and another man has desisted for fear of discovery, and supposing they were both brought into the presence of Him whose eyes are as flame, wherein would be the difference? Both would stand condemned.

"Some would have absented themselves from worship, but ..." But what? "But for the look of the thing." Then a man who would have absented himself was never present. People who attend God's house for the look of the thing, never come at all. They would be absent if they dared. Then what they would do, they do. "These people draw nigh to Me, but their hearts are far from Me."

"Some would have withdrawn their subscriptions, but ..." But what? "But for the published lists." Then they have withdrawn them. On this plane, the man who would do, has done. He whose liberality is determined by his publicity, has never given unto the Lord. "By Him actions are weighed." He does not count the amount of the offertory. He notes the disposition of the giver. "Bring no more vain oblations." The vain oblation is the gift without the giver, and with God such giving is not received. Here then is the principle I am seeking to expound. We are no better than our inclinations. Our wishes denote far more than our deeds. A man's desires register his attainments.

Now let us turn the whole matter round. If we are measured by our "would-bes," the principle would have application not only to vice, but to virtue. We are not judged by our fulfilments, but by our aspirations. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." The desire to build the temple was interpreted by the Lord as a temple already built. What we would if we had the opportunity, we shall be credited with having done.

"Some would have gone to serve in the foreign field, but ..." But what? "The door was never opened." Then, in the sight of God, such men and women have gone. To God they are foreign missionaries, and the glory of the mission-field is theirs. They would have gone, but there was an old mother to care for at home, or an invalid sister to watch, or an imbecile brother to tend. They toiled on here in the homeland, but their heart was ever away in lands of bondage and night. God will take the will for the deed. These men and women will wear the missionary's crown. Their "would- be" will be regarded as a "well-done."

"Some would have given much to the cause of the King, but ..." But what? "Their means were straitened, and they had great difficulty in keeping the wolf from the door." They gave their little mite to the Lord's work with a great desire that it might have been more. They gave a mite plus a "would-do." Such giving is never to be estimated by the monetary quantity of the gift. "This poor woman hath given more than all." "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted with God."

"Some would have given themselves to active Christian service, but ..." But what? "They are bed-ridden." They are chronic invalids. They lie in the bondage of continual pain. How will they be regarded in the day of the great reckoning? They will be judged by their "would-bes." Their life will be estimated not by its attainments, but by its inclinations. But is there not some little peril in thus distinguishing between inclinations and attainments, as though inclination in itself were not a great attainment? Oh, the mystic energy of many a "would-be"! The "would-be" is a prayer, and the fragrance of heaven is made of the perfume of prayer. "Golden vessels full of odours which are the prayers of saints." We cannot measure the influences of the "would- bes" that lie like fervent flames in the hearts of many of the saints of God. They are creating an atmosphere, and in this atmosphere much of the best work of the kingdom is accomplished. Our "would-bes" will constitute our crowns.