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

**17. AWE AND TRUST by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord."*

*Psalm 4:4,5*

"STAND in awe, and sin not." This seems to be a little remote from the phraseology of modern religious life. Our vocabulary is of a different type and order. Words like awe, fear, trembling, appear to be almost obsolete. Our speech finds its emphasis in such words as happiness, joy, peace, comfort. The Psalmist throws us back to quite a different plane. "Stand in awe, and sin not!" This man has had a vision of the great white Throne. He has been contemplating the terrors of the Lord. He has listened to the awful imperatives. He has had a glimpse of the midnight of alienation. He spent his days in levity, as though God and duty were distant and irrelevant trifles. But now his eyes have come upon the whiteness of the Eternal, the unsullied sovereignty, the holiness that would not be trifled with, and his careless walk is sharply arrested. His levity is changed into trembling. His indifference is broken up in awe. We have seen the experience in miniature, even in the fellowship of man with man. One man has introduced a piece of indecent or questionable foolery in the presence of another man, and he has been immediately confronted with a face which chilled his blood and froze his levity into a stilled and wondering silence. No man's life will ever be deepened into fruitful awe if he has not seen similar features confronting him in the countenance of God. "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil." "Woe is me, for mine eyes have seen the King." We have got to see the Face if we are to be checked in our frivolity, and if we are to feel our indecencies blazing within us like a destructive fire.

Why is there so little awe in our religious lives to-day? Why is there so little fruitful fear? How is it that we have altogether lost the apostolic trembling? Is it because we have lost that Face? Do we intentionally hide it? The whiteness of the Saviour is not alluring. We prefer the sweetness. And so we gather up all the gracious promises. We lift them out of their context. We see them out of relationship to the general body of truth. We lose their proportion, and they become hurtful rather than sanctifying. Promises gathered in their relationship to warnings will tend to our good. Flowers found in God's world as He plants them will do us no harm; but massed together in heaps as they are by the perfume-makers in Southern France, they become breeders of disease. It is not intended that we should accumulate heaps of gracious promises, and overlook the severities of Revelation. Found as Christ proclaimed them they enliven and cheer; thoughtlessly massed together they lull into spiritual stupor.

We can see the same tendency in our choice of hymns. We do not like the hymns in which the whirlwind sweeps and drives. We prefer the hymns that are just filled with honey. And so the "sweet" hymns are the favourites, and the sweeter they are the more welcome they are to our palates. We have partially dropped the hymns that harrow and alarm, and which minister to our fear. Some of us have got what we sometimes call a "sweet Jesus." We know Him only as the Speaker of gentle and condescending speech, and of tender, winsome invitation. We have not got a Jesus before Whom we frequently "stand in awe." We glide on in the religious life heedlessly, and at no moment do we stand appalled.

Many of us have lost the severities of the New Testament, and we have nothing to fear. Shall I recall one or two of these forgotten severities? "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Whatever may be the meaning of these words, they are of such import as to make us "stand in awe." They indicate a severity which is the corollary of the Lord's holiness. It is because these terrors are left out in our religious conceptions and in our preaching, that the frivolity of men is gratified and coddled by illegitimate sweetness. In a memorandum, written in the year of his ordination, Newman said: "Those who make comfort the great subject of their preaching seem to mistake the end of their ministry. Holiness is the great end, comfort is a cordial, but no one drinks cordials from morning to night." We must re-proclaim the elements of severity which minister to a bracing holiness. Men do not feel the power of the Gospel when in Christ they discern nothing to fear. Many men are lost because they do not see the great white Throne. Thomas Boston said that the net of the Gospel needed to be weighted with the leads of the terrors of the law, or it would lightly float on the surface and no fish be caught. We must steadily keep in view the sterner patches of the New Testament teaching. We must con template the whiteness of the Eternal, and stand in awe.

"Commune with your own heart upon your own bed, and be still." When we have gazed upon the undefiled heights, upon the holiness of God, we are then to hold a soliloquy with ourselves. In his "Saint's Everlasting Rest," Richard Baxter says that every good Christian is a good preacher to his own soul. The very same methods which a minister uses in his preaching to others, every Christian should endeavour after in speaking to himself. Having seen the Throne, let us hold converse with our own hearts. "Commune with thine own heart upon thy bed." The darkness of night is the most appropriate season. There is nothing in these hours to ensnare the eyes and to entice the mind to distraction. In the darkness introspection becomes easy. "Be still." Shut the door. Silence every distraction. Reject every mental intruder. Take nothing with thee into thy heart, except the vision of the Throne. Then call out the contents of thy heart. Challenge them; question them; cross-examine them. Let nothing remain hid. Let thy awed feeling be with thee in the inquest. Search out every corner. Set everything in the light of His countenance. You ask if it is difficult work? Yes. The most difficult work to which man can apply himself. The revelation adds fear to awe, and our condition becomes appalling. Once let a man go with the awed vision into his own spirit, and he will be filled with the trembling which is the earnest of a great salvation. "What must I do to be saved?"

"Offer the sacrifices of righteousness" What ever these words may have meant to the Psalmist, they can only mean one thing for us who live in the light of the Gospel day. When a man has contemplated the dazzling holiness of God, and in self-communion has discovered his own dark appalling need, and, full of trembling, turns again to the Father, he has only one resource. He must "offer the sacrifice of righteousness." Christ Jesus is our "Righteousness." "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." We have no hope but in His death. In His offering we re-discover our completeness. In His sacrifice we find our life and security. This is no beautiful theory detached from the hard facts of burdensome life. A million souls can set their testimony to it and seal it to be true. When they had ransacked their own heart and found it to be a nest of defilement, and they were filled with fear, they turned to the love of Calvary and found provision for both fear and defilement, and in the crucified Christ found purity and rest.

"Not the labour of my hands

Can fulfil Thy laws' demands;

Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears for ever flow,

All for sin could not atone;

Thou must save, and Thou alone."

"And put your trust in the Lord." How graciously the passage closes! The awe and the trembling converge in fruitful trust! The discovery of the holy Sovereignty, the discovery of personal defilement, the discovery of a Redeemer, are consummated in the discovery of rest. When I have found my "Righteousness" my part is now to trust. The awe, the purity of the holy Sovereignty will become mine. Trust keeps open the line of communication between the soul and God. Along that line convoys of blessedness are brought into the heart; manifold gifts of grace for the weak and defenceless spirit. When I trust I keep open the "highway of the Lord," and along that road there come to me from the Eternal my bread, my water, my instructions, my powers of defence. "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." I can "work out my own salvation with fear and trembling."