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

**18. THE LIVING WATER by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Everyone that drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life."*

*John 4:13,14*

"EVERYONE that drinketh of this water shall thirst again." It is not difficult to discern traces of this thirst in the faces of those whom we meet in the common way. If we take our stand at the corner of the street and scan the faces of the passing crowd, it is only now and again that we gaze upon a countenance which is significant of peace. How rarely the face suggests the joy and the serenity of a healthy satisfaction! We are confronted by an abounding unrest! The majority of people seem to be afflicted with the pain of unsatisfied want. The very faces are suggestive of a disquieting thirst. We have a varied vocabulary in which we describe this prevailing condition: -- "Unrest" "discontented," "dissatisfied," "not right with himself." And very frequently this internal disquietude manifests itself in external irritableness, in a general disagreeableness towards one's neighbours and friends. Let us quietly contemplate some of the people who are the victims of consuming and disquieting thirst. There is the great army of men and women who are possessed by the fever of worry. There is no calm collectedness about their life. They have no seasons of cool reflection. Their life is feverish from morning till night. How has the fever arisen? Sometimes fever is the result of a chill. A cold wind suddenly arises and blows across the life, a wind of disappointment which blights some happy ambition; a wind of bad news which chills us in the midst of a feast. These wintry visitations are often productive of subsequent worry, and they issue in spiritual feverishness. We become "heated hot with burning fears." There is also a large company of men and women who may be described as dominated by the lust of bliss. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O pleasure!" These are the souls that are always thirsting after new sensations. The old delights speedily pall, and afford no gratification to the jaded palate. They require something of a more piquant flavour. It is like dram drinking; at the commencement they find pleasure in dilutions; in the long run they take it "neat." There is also the army of those who are scorched with the craving of carnal passion. Any reference to this can be made in a word. It is a bonfire that licks up all the cool dews and moisture of the spiritual life. Every leaf withers, every flower languishes and fades. The soul that is imprisoned in a temple of carnality is stricken with indescribable thirst. Then there are those in whose lives there is the smouldering fire of a dull indifference. There is thirst even in those in whom indifference seems to reign; nay, the indifferent are often the most restless in their racing about among the pools. They call their restlessness by quite another name, but its proper name is spiritual thirst. And then, lastly, there are those who are burdened with the sense of sin, and who are possessed by a fervent longing for the living God. "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." "I thirst for the living God."

By what resources do men seek to allay their thirst? They are weary in their worry; they are tired in their pleasures, they are sick of their passions, how do they seek to quieten the soul within them, and to lead their life into rest? Too often resort is made to the "waters of the earth." We try to allay a spiritual thirst by a carnal draught. When Newman in his early life was burdened with the sense of his own shortcomings in the presence of his Lord, and his letters home lacked their usual buoyancy, his mother wrote to him: -- "Your father and I fear very much from the tone of your letters that you are depressed. We fear you debar yourself a proper quantity of wine." That is a type of suggestion which is often made to people who are troubled with spiritual unrest. They are recommended to material ministries by which their feverish unrest is only intensified and inflamed. But they "thirst again." Others make an attempt to realise satisfaction and peace by immersing themselves in stimulants like novel-reading and theatre-going, and in the manifold pleasures of society. They intensify the social stimulant. Yet they "thirst again." Others plunge more deeply into business. The songster is languishing! How then? Re-gild his cage. The soul is languishing! How then? Re-gild her cage. Seek for more gold, more gold, and surround the soul with material treasure. And yet the soul refuses to be appeased, and "thirsts again." Or, again, we give opiates to our disquieted and feverish souls. How people find an opiate in making a promise to amend. They find contentment in their intentions. But the satisfaction is only transient. They speedily awake out of their unnatural rest, and they are thirsty still. Others give themselves the opiate of self-disparagement. Many a man thinks he is becoming better because he severely condemns himself. They esteem it a sign of virtue to denounce themselves as fools. They discover a sort of spiritual comfort from their own self-severity. All these are pitiable evasions. At the best they are only transient ministries, which, when their immediate influence passes away, leave us in deepened disquietude and intensified unrest.

Now let us turn to Jesus. "He would have given thee living water" The Master deals with the painful thirst of men by bringing to them the gift of spiritual energy. He pours into the languishing soul spiritual forces that refresh and vitalise, that restore and maintain. John Calvin says: -- "There is no sap and vigour in us until the Lord waters us by His Spirit." The coming of the Living Water into the life is creative of "sap and vigour." All the powers of the life are vitalised. The languishing conscience, the impaired affections, the sluggish emotion, the enfeebled will, all are invigorated by the inrush into the soul of "the river of water of life." We become "trees of the Lord," and the "trees of the Lord are full of sap."

"The water that I shall give you shall be in you a well." It is the gift of internal energy; the resources are within us. I stood a little while ago in the fine old ruin of Middleham Castle, I passed beyond the outer shell, and beyond the inner defences into the keep, and there in the innermost sanctum of the venerable pile was the old well. The castle was independent of outside supplies. If it were besieged it had resources of water at its own heart. The changing seasons made no difference to the gracious supply. That is the purpose of our Master in placing the "well" within us. He wants to make us independent of external circumstances. Whatever be the season that reigns without, He wants fulness and vitality to reign within. So the Master's gift is the gift of a well, "springing up," leaping up, "into eternal life." "We are renewed by His Spirit in the inner man."

"Whosoever drinketh ... shall never thirst" It is a spiritual energy. It is an eternal energy. It is a persistent energy. "Never thirst." That does not mean that in the Christian life desire is ended. "The ill of all ills is the death of desire." In the redeemed life desire is intense and wakeful. There is desiring, but no despairing. There is longing, but no languishing. There is fervour, but no fever. There is aspiration and contentment. There is striving and rest. We still thirst for the fulness of grace not yet received, but there is no pain in the thirst. In the Christian life the very thirst for greater fulness is itself a delight. If I may quote Calvin again: "Believers know desire, but they do not know drought."

And what is the glorious issue of this indwelling energy of grace? "It shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life" The grace continues with us, and over flows into a blessed immortality. The Spirit that redeems will also perfect. Whatever may be our estate when it finds us, our ultimate attainments will be the likeness of the Lord. "The living water rises from Heaven, and rises towards Heaven." We shall at length be presented blameless before the Throne of God. "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."