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

**19. THE PALSIED SOUL by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay."*

*Mark 1:1-4*

HERE is a swift series of pictures both forceful and pathetic. There is the helpless paralytic, his face now and again revealing the faint flickering light of a glimmering hope, like the spasms of diluted sunshine which sometimes break through the murky November gloom. And here are the four friends, sympathetic, optimistic, perfectly assured, urging their way through the thick-set surging crowd. And here are "certain of the Scribes" sitting in the house, cold, unemotional, friendly only to precedent and tradition, and jealous for the sustained authority of their own school. And in the midst of it all, the Master! What does He think about it? What is the nature of His aspirations? What does He see? He sees the invisible. The merely material becomes the unsubstantial, and the spiritual stands revealed. The picturesque setting melts away, and the unseen background of dispositions emerges into view. Bodies become transparencies, and the naked spirit stands unveiled in the searching light of the uncreated beam. The harvest of the Master's eye is gathered from the mystic fields of the soul. He gazes at the bearers and sees their faith. He looks behind the rebellious limbs of the palsied and sees the servitude of the soul. He pierces the hard, impassive masks of the Scribes, and reads their innermost thoughts. Everywhere it is the unseen which becomes conspicuous; the spiritual becomes emphatic. Let us look at the scene through the Master's interpreting eyes, and in His light we may see light.

The Master sees the faith of the bearers. "Jesus seeing their faith." There we have the faith in its last analysis. Its essential ingredient is simple confidence. It is not primarily the apprehension of a doctrine, it is simple trust in a person. To have faith in Jesus is to have confidence in the ability and reliability of Jesus to do what He claims to do. We have a similar instance in the graphic narrative recorded in the ninth chapter of John. I know that towards the end of that great chapter the once blind man is confronted with the mighty demand: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Yes, but the question was asked only after his sight had been restored. Simple faith had been manifested before Jesus sought to incite him to the grip of a large and vitalising doctrine. "Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam." The man obeyed and went. That was the vital element in his faith. The simple faith paved the way to the larger belief. The healed man was ready for the unveiling of the personality of the Healer; but first of all the primary faith consisted in untroubled confidence, in perfect trust that Jesus was as good as His word, and would make His word good. So it is in the passage before us. These four men had trust in the Saviour's trustworthiness. They were assured that He had the power and the disposition to fulfil His own programme -- "The recovery of sight to the blind, and the setting at liberty of them that are bruised."

Now if simple trust be the primary ingredient in faith, see how such faith in Jesus operates in the common life. The faith of these friends of the paralytic had three characteristics. It was energetic. It was a workful faith. Vital faith and vital energy are inseparable. There is a wonderful little list of inseparables in the Epistle to the Thessalonians. "Your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope." Faith evinces itself in work, and love in labour, and hope in patience. Where there is no faith, there is a consequent loss of heart and loss of courage, and strength is dissipated in waste of retreat. The faith of these men was full of power, applying itself as a splendid dynamic in actual service. It was philanthropic. Faith is primarily individualistic. Influentially it is grandly socialistic. The sweep of its energy inevitably enwraps the lives of others. In the energy of its prayers, its ambitions, its strivings after holiness, we discover a force which is humane and philanthropic, "looking not only at its own things, but also on the things of others." Faith laid hold of this poor paralytic, the man of the palsied body and soul, and carried him to the Master's feet. It is in ventive. Unbelief soon exhausts its resources: it makes a hopeless and therefore a lukewarm attempt, fails and turns back and says: "I told you so." Faith is full of ideas, expediencies, designs. Faith is fertile, and plans devices. Does the road seem closed this way? Faith says: We will try another. Have the usual methods failed to reach the masses? Then faith will employ the ministry of the Salvation Army. Have the ordinary services proved uninviting? Then faith will begin a P.S.A. When faith could not get near one way, she uncovered the roof! This man must be brought to the Master, and the pushing inventiveness of an energetic faith, makes a way, and lays its burden at the Healer's feet.

The Master sees the spiritual misery of the palsied. Here lies the man. His muscular action has lost its motion owing to some insidious disease upon the nerves. He can no longer command the muscular activities of his own body. Here he lies a helpless log. The Master looks at him, through him, and, behold! another kind of paralysis is revealed. The man cannot command the activities of his own soul. His spiritual volition is impaired. His body is imprisoned in the palsy, his soul is imprisoned in sin. The four friends had laid the paralysed body at the Master's feet, and they expected that the great Healer would immediately address Himself to its clamant needs. How startled they would be when the first words of the Master had no reference to the body, but were addressed to some need apparently remote. "Thy sins be forgiven thee." The Lord addresses Himself to the direst need, to the palsied spirit. He sets Himself to liberate the powers and dignities of the soul. The paralysis of the soul is unveiled by the Bible in startling phraseology. Let me recall one or two of the phrases, that we may sharpen our conception by what is meant by the hideous presence of sin. "Sin dwelleth in me": my personality is a kind of house, and sin is the master of the house. "Sin reigneth in me": sin is not only my master but my tyrant. "I was sold unto sin": I am a piece of merchandise, and I am disposed of into slavery; sold to a lust; to an evil desire; to the habit of greed; to the passion of jealousy, or to the ugly genius of revenge. "They are all under sin"; we are under its crushing domination, as though its feet were upon our necks. "Sin abounds": it is a horrible disease that scatters its prolific germs over every faculty and disposition of life. In all these phrases I see what is meant by the appalling sovereignty of sin. It is a dominion which results in a moral and spiritual paralysis, every dignity and prerogative in the life being crushed in an unclean and debasing servitude. And so to this sin-bound soul the Master brings the gracious evangel of forgiveness. "Thy sins be forgiven thee." The forgiveness of the Lord is not some sweet and ineffectual sentiment. It is the mystic and mighty energy of creation engaged in the work of re-creation. When the Lord says "Forgiven," the life that was locked and imprisoned in icy winter feels round about it the influence of a warm and expansive spring. The Bible appears almost to wrestle for a varied phraseology in which to reveal the realities of this glorious deliverance. Sins are to be "blotted out," "wiped away," "covered," "taken away." Where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. The forces of spiritual health are in the ascendant, and the powers of evil and night are dethroned and in retreat. "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come." When the Master said: "Thy sins are forgiven thee," an angel might have witnessed: "This thy brother was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found."