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

**20. THE BUSINESS INSTINCT IN RELIGION by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman."*

*Matthew 13:45*

IF the citizen of the Kingdom of God can be suggestively compared to a merchantman, there must be something about him exceedingly businesslike and enterprising. Our Lord appears to teach that business qualities are needful in the pursuit of the things that are needful in the Kingdom of God. I am to be as businesslike in my religious life as I am in my commercial life. The peril proclaimed is this, that men who are exceedingly business like in the market are exceedingly unbusiness like in the sanctuary, and that men who are thoroughly alert and enterprising in earning their daily bread are sleepy and resourceless in their pursuit of a holy life. There are many men who are sharp and shrewd and all alive in the world, who are dull and sluggish in the Church. Men, somehow or other, drop their business instincts when they go about their Father's business. Now this parable is an appeal to men to bring into religion the same wide-awake business capabilities which they exercise in the affairs of the world. If men would be as businesslike in the pursuit of holiness as they are in their pursuit of gold, they would speedily become spiritual millionaires, wealthily endowed with the unsearchable riches of Christ. The perfecting counsel of the parable is therefore this: Be as business like in the building up of character as you are in the building up of fortune. Bring your business gifts and aptitudes in the affairs of business, and exercise them in the acquisition of the treasures of Heaven.

Now I propose to go into business life and cull out two or three of the qualities which are essential to worldly success. And then I propose to carry them over to the life of the spirit, where we shall find them to be the secrets of perpetual growth.

Here, then, is a quality which is greatly esteemed in the ways of the world -- the quality of alertness. It is characteristic of every successful merchantman. If I listen to the ordinary speech of the man of the world, I find how great is the value which he places upon this gift. "A man must have all his wits about him." "It is the early bird that catches the worm." These are recognised maxims in the way of success, and they point to the commanding necessity of an alertful spirit. A merchantman must be alert for the detection of hidden perils. He must be alert for the perception of equally hidden opportunity. He must be alert for the recognition of failing methods. His eyes must clearly see where old roads are played out, and where new ground may be broken. Let us carry the suggestion over into the affairs of the Kingdom. The Scriptures abound in counsel to alertness. "Awake, awake!" "Watch ye!" "Let us watch and be sober!" "Watching unto prayer." It is an all-essential ingredient in the life of the progressive saint. He is to be on the alert against pitfalls, against bad bargains, against selling pearls for refuse, against impoverishing compromise. "Watch ye, lest ye fall into temptation." He is to be on the alert for opportunity. What eyes our Lord wants us to have in the things of the Kingdom! "Watch ye, for at such an hour when ye think not the Son of Man comes." We never know when the august Visitor may turn up. He may appear in some tame and common place duty, and if we are not "all alive" we shall never suspect His presence, and we shall miss His appearing. He is always showing His face, and to have knowledge of His presence is great gain. Therefore it is all-needful that we watch every colour, that we look into the eyes of every moment, if perchance we may see the opportunity of becoming rich in the treasures of Heaven. So are we to be on the alert for the conversion of everything into spiritual gold. "Buy up the opportunity." We are especially to look at things that appear to be useless, lest they turn out to be the raw material of the garments of Heaven. Sir Titus Salt, walking along the quay of Liverpool, saw a pile of unclean waste. He saw it with very original eyes, and had the vision of a perfected and beautified product. He saw the possibilities in discarded refuse, and he bought the opportunity. That is perhaps the main business of the successful citizen of the Kingdom, the conversion of waste. This disappointment which I have had to-day, what can I make out of it? What an eye it wants to see the ultimate gain in checked and chilled ambition --

"To stretch a hand through time,

and catch The far-off interest of tears."

This grief of mine, what can I make of it? Must I leave it as waste in the tract of the years, or can it be turned into treasure? This pain of mine, is it only a lumbering burden, or does the ungainly vehicle carry heavenly gold? It is in conditions of this kind that the spiritual expert reveals himself. He is all "alive unto God," and seeing the opportunity he seizes it like a successful merchantman.

I go again into business life in order to gain a knowledge of the attributes of success. And this is what I hear one man say to another who has risen to fortune: "Everything about him goes like clockwork." Of another man whose days witness a gradual degeneracy quite another word is spoken: "He has no system, no method, everything goes by the rule of chance." Then the quality of method appears to be one of the essentials of a successful man of affairs. Is this equally true in the things of the Kingdom? How many there are of us who, in our religious life, are loose, slipshod, unmethodical! How unsystematic we are in our worship and our prayers! Our worldly business would speedily drop into ruin if we applied to it the same inconsiderate ways with which we discharge the duties of our religion. William Law, in his inspired book, "Call to a Devout Life," has instructed us in methodical devotion. He systematically divides the day, devoting to certain hours and certain seasons special kinds of praises and prayers. This was the early glory of the Methodist denomination. Their distinctiveness consisted in the systematic ordering of the Christian life. I know that too much method may become a bondage, but too little may become a rout. Too much red tape is creative of servitude, but to have no red tape at all is to be the victim of disorder. There is a happy medium between chaos and bondage. There is a reasonable method which leaves play for the spontaneous exercises of thought and affection. We need some method in prayer. We can so habituate ourselves to pray at certain seasons, that when the hour comes round, the soul is instinctively found upon its knees. We need some method in the arrangement of our prayers, lest they settle down into narrowness and poverty, and are wanting in sympathy and appreciation. We need method in our spiritual labours. Even the ministry on behalf of others requires to be regular and systematic. We need to have method of benefactions. It is the people who do not give by method who are always prone to greatly exaggerate the amount they give. Giving irregularly, they are ignorant of their giving, and their selfish instinct prompts them to think it great. A healthy citizen of the Kingdom of God is like unto a merchantman, and his life is regulated by vigorous order.

I go again into the realm of business, and here is a sentence that encounters me from one who knows the road: "The habit of firm decision is indispensable to a man of business." The real business man waits till the hour is come, and then acts decisively. "He strikes while the iron is hot." An undecisive business man lives in perpetual insecurity. He meanders along in wavering uncertainty until his business house has to be closed. Is not this element of decision needful in the light of the Spirit? Religious life is too apt to be full of "ifs" and "buts" and "perhapses" and "peradventures." I am experiencing at this moment a fervent holy spiritual impulse. In what consists my salvation? To strike while the iron is hot? "Suffer me first to go to bid them farewell." No, the iron will speedily grow cold. While the holy thing glows before you, strongly decide and concentrate your energies in supporting your decision. "I am resolved what to do." That was said by a man of the world. Let it be the speech of the man of the Kingdom of God.

I will go again into the ways of the world, that I may find instruction for the way of the Kingdom. I find that in business life it is essential that a man must run risks and make ventures. He must be daring, and he must have the element of courage. What says the man of the world? "Nothing venture, nothing win." "Faint heart never won fair lady." Faint heart never wins anything. John Bunyan's Faintheart had repeatedly to be carried. Has the citizen of the Kingdom to risk anything? Indeed he has. He must risk the truth. A lie might appear to offer him a bargain, but he must risk the truth. Let him sow the truth, even though the threatened harvest may be tears. Let him venture the truth, even though great and staggering loss seems to be drawn to his door. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." A man has again and again to make his choice between Christ and thirty pieces of silver. Let him make the venture, let the silver go; risk the loss! If it means putting up the shutters he will go out with Christ! "He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." Alertness, method, decision, courage! These are some of the qualities that are needed by the citizen of the Kingdom. With these splendid business instincts he will do fine bargaining, and become rich in faith and hope and in love