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

**24. THE ROOTS OF THE BLESSED LIFE by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."*

*Psalm 34:11-14*

"WHAT man is he that desireth life and loveth many days that he may see good?" That is an old-world statement of a persistent problem, but I want to read it without the Old Testament limitations. We have the same problem, but we perhaps give it a slightly different expression. "What man is he that desireth life?" Who wants to truly live, to be thoroughly alive, to be lifted above the plain of mere existence, and placed in conditions of amazing vitality and fertility? "And loveth many days?" What man is he that desireth a large life, a life of spacious activities, of grand persistence and continuity? "That he may see good." What man is he that desireth a life that will extract the real "good " out of things, that will gather the honey in the hidden places, that will discover the essences in experiences, and get the marrow out of trifling and apparently inconsiderable events. That is the modern statement of the problem. Who desires to be really alive, abounding in vital energy, possessed of such fine perceptions as will explore all the affairs of life, and discern their secret treasure? In what can we find the life of blessedness, full, spacious and refined?

The Psalmist's setting of the problem is not without its suggestion. The statement of the spacious life of blessedness, extracting the secret flavours and essences of things, is placed in a very significant context. On the one hand, we have "the fear of the Lord"; on the other hand, "keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." On the one side is theology, on the other side is morality. The one expresses a certain relationship to God, and the other a certain relationship to man. And between these two, rising out of them, as though from them it received its nutriment, emerges the life of blessedness with its perception of the finest issues in creation. And therefore the blessed life is like a plant with a two-fold root, one root reaching away into union with God, and the other root embedded in pure fellowship with man. Let us look at the two roots.

**1.** "The fear of the Lord." Now fear is not fearfulness. In seeking an interpretation of the word, we must put aside all ideas of terror, of trembling servitude, of cringing servility. If the content included any element of terror, the spiritual life would be a doleful bondage; but there are strange conjunctions in the Word of God which make this interpretation impossible. What an amazing companionship is to be found in these words: -- "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice!" The significance of the passage is just this, that whatever the fear of the Lord may be, it is consistent with the presence of a ceaseless joy. Fear is a disposition which can lodge in the same heart with delight. The same suggestion is conveyed to us by many passages in the writings of the Apostle Paul. In the Epistle to the Philippians, he emphasises and re-emphasises the duty of rejoicing, and yet in the same Epistle he enjoins his readers to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling." Fear, therefore, is not synonymous with terror, for terror is never the companion of joy.

What, then, can be the inner suggestion of the phrase, "the fear of the Lord!" Let us make an inquest into the word. The primary significance of the term is allied to our conception of reverence. Now reverence implies perception; perception further implies sensitiveness, and in this last word I think we touch the essential content of the biblical word "fear." "The fear of the Lord " is sensitiveness towards the Lord. It is the opposite of hardness, unfeelingness, benumbment. The soul that fears God lies exposed before Him in a sensitiveness that discerns His most silent approach. The life is like a sensitive plate exposed to the light, and it records the faintest ray. Now carrying this suggestion I get a glimpse of the meaning of some of the great phrases of the word of God. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Sensitiveness towards God is the beginning of wisdom. Sensitiveness in music is the beginning of musical ability; sensitiveness in art is the beginning of artistic competence. Sensitiveness towards God is the beginning of expertness in the knowledge and doings of God. "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life." This sensitiveness is spoken of as the beginning, as the fountain out of which all riper issues are to proceed. This sensitiveness towards God is one of the roots of the blessed life. To thrill to His faintest breathings, to hear the still small voice, to catch the first dim light of new revelations, to be exquisitely responsive to the movements of the Father, this is the great primary rootage of a full and blessed life. Happy is it for the expositor that he is now able to add that this sensitiveness towards God is a gift of God. "I will put my fear in their hearts." By waiting upon the Lord, His refining ministry begins to restore the hardened surfaces of our life, and fills us again with a spirit of rare and exquisite discernment.

**2.** We turn now to the second suggestion of the roots and sources of the blessed life: -- "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." This appears to be a startling descent from the high plain on which we have just been moving. To pass from the august relationship with God to the controlling of one's speech appears to be an amazing leap. It is stupendously significant that in disclosing the secrets of the blessed life, the Psalmist should immediately turn to the government of the tongue. Our speech is so often destructive of our blessedness. All speech has a reflex influence. Poison-soaked speech has first of all poisoned the speaker. Every word we speak recoils upon the speaker's heart, and leaves its influence, either in grace or disfigurement. Therefore "keep thy tongue from evil." Hold it in severe restriction. Venom, that passes out, also steeps in. "And thy lips from speaking guile." This is only a slight variation of the former word. Where the lips are treacherous, the heart is ill at ease. Where the lips are untrue, the heart abounds in suspicion. Where the lips have spoken the lie, the heart is afraid of exposure. How, then, can there be blessedness where there is dread? How can there be a quiet and fruitful happiness where poison is impairing the higher powers? "Let nothing proceed out of your mouth but what is good unto edifying." "Neither was any deceit in His mouth."

"Depart from evil." Turn from it. Regard thyself in revolt. Rebel, and remove thyself. Don't play with uncleanness. Don't touch it with thy finger. Don't hold conversation concerning it, for there are some things of which it is a "shame even to speak." "Depart from evil and do good" The best way to effect a permanent divorce from evil is to exercise one's self in active good. Where there is no positive ministry in goodness, we soon relapse into sin. A positive goodness will make the life invincible. The devil's hardest work is with the souls that are pre-occupied. They are so absorbed in their beautiful labours that they never see his glittering allurements, and are never enticed into the old destructive way. If we want the blessed life, full, safe, and abounding, we must "depart from evil and do good."

"Seek peace and pursue it." Not the peace of quietness, not, at any rate, the quietness of still machinery, but perhaps the smoothness of machinery at work. We have to live together in families, in societies, in nations, as a race. To seek peace is to seek the smooth workings of this complicated fellowship. We are to labour for right adjustments, equitable fellowships. We are to get the gravel and the grit out of the fine machinery. We are to rid human fellowship of its envy and jealousy and thoughtlessness and ill-will. We are to labour that the companionships of God's children may run smoothly without a wasting and painful friction. "Seek peace and pursue it." We are not to give up the search because we are not immediately successful. We are not to cease to be reformers because the reformation is not gained in a day. We are not to say that society is hopeless because we make such little headway in the work of re-adjustment. We are to "pursue" the great aim, to chase it with all the eagerness of a keen hunter, determined not to relax the search until the mighty end is gained.

Here, then, are some of the secrets of the blessed life -- the sensitive union with God and a clean and self-sacrificing fellowship with man. With conversation sanctified, and conduct purified, and in our daily life the very ministry of the Cross, and, above all, holding high and ceaseless fellowship with the King, we shall know the preciousness and the glory of the blessed life.