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

**26. A TESTIMONY MEETING by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto Him, and were lightened; and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."*

*Psalm 34:3-7*

"O MAGNIFY the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together." It is a call to social worship. It is the cry of a soul possessed by the spirit of praise, and yearning to have fellow ship with the thanksgiving of others. "God's praises sound best in concert." The praise that lifts its voice in solitude is beautiful, but it is far more beautiful when heard in communion with the praise of one's fellows. The violin gains something from an accompaniment. Each instrument in the orchestra is enriched by the co-operation of the others. Each member in a chorus has his discernment sharpened, and his zeal intensified by the remaining members. So it is in the orchestra of praise. My own thanks-giving is quickened and enriched when I join it to the praises of others. My own note is gladdened. My eagerness is inflamed.

"Come let us join our cheerful songs,

With angels round the throne;

Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,

But all their joys are one."

In response to this appeal for social worship, the text appears to suggest that a number of thankful souls gathered together, and, each contributing his own testimony of the exceeding graciousness of God, they joined in an outburst of united and jubilant praise. They formed a kind of fellowship meeting for testimony and adoration. Here is one of the testimonies: "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." And here is the gladsome confession of quite a numerous company. "They looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed." And here, again, is the witness of an inspired and grateful soul: "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." Is it any wonder that, after testimonies such as these, there should arise a spontaneous outburst of confident and delightful thanksgiving? "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." Let us listen a little more needfully to the individual testimonies.

"I sought the Lord and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." What had been this man's burden? It was the burden of "fears." He was easily panic-stricken. He moved in continual trembling. He was afraid of yesterday. He dared not think of the morrow. He shrank from the conception of death. He was surrounded by terrors. He took no step in confidence, afraid that at each step the ground might open beneath his feet. He was John Bunyan's "Mr Fearing." He was "always afraid that he should come short of whither he had a desire to go." "Everything frightened him that he heard anybody speak of, that had but the least appearance of opposition in it." When he came to the Slough of Despond he "lay moaning for a month together." And "when he was over, he would scarce believe it." He was burdened with "fears." I am afraid that examples of the type would not be difficult to find. There are many people who are not afflicted by calamity, but who are greatly burdened by the fear of it. There are many whose sky is full of light, but who are afraid of the coming night. This would appear to have been the plight of the man to whose confession we are now listening.

What did he make his resource? "I sought the Lord" The seeking was a real business. Into the inquisition he put his whole soul. It was no languid aspiration, no lukewarm search. He "set himself to seek God." I like that Old Testament phrase. There is an air of business like intensity about it; it throbs with definite purpose and decided resolve. There is the promise of ultimate triumph in the initial movement. Of this man we shall be able to say, "He that seeketh, findeth."

And what was the issue of the search? "He heard me." The somewhat vague term "heard" scarcely expresses the content of the Psalmist's mind. The significance of the term is more than hearing. It implies heeding and responding. Man's "seeking" was responded to by a sympathetic movement on the part of God. "And delivered me from all my fears" "He delivered me." That is a full-coloured and full-blooded word, abounding in strength and vitality. It suggests the act of rescuing something out of a beast's mouth. As though my "fears" were a pack of wild beasts, and I repeatedly find myself in their jaws. I am daily devoured. My peace is consumed. It is from spiritual havoc of this kind that our Lord delivers us. "I will deliver my flock from their mouth." The rescue is not partial. The relief is by no means incomplete. The freedom is absolute. "He delivered me from all my fears." As an old Puritan commentator put it. "God sweeps the field, slays the enemies, and even buries their bones."

Let us listen to the second of these grateful testimonies. "They looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed." The burden which this little company had carried is not mentioned. But I think it is quite easy to infer it from their confession. The gracious answer of God brought a benediction of light. They were "lightened." Then before they must have been darkened. There was no light in their faces. They were cheerless and depressed. They were cast down and melancholic, and inclined to the bondage of despair. They were "losing heart." And what was their resource? "They looked unto Him." They gazed intently upon God. It was no snatch look, no hurried glances, no passing nod of recognition. It was a fixed and eager gaze. We may apprehend the intensity of the look by calling to mind a strange phrase used by the Prophet Isaiah. "Look, ye blind, that ye may see." The blind are called upon to exert the muscles of their darkened eyes, to stretch them as though they 'would see; and in the strenuous working they should obtain their sight. That is the figure which suggests the kind of "looking" which is fruitful in spiritual vision. They fixed their thought upon God; they held it there, even though the effort were productive of an aching pain. And what was the outcome of their gaze? They "were lightened" They were made to sparkle. They were brightened up, lit up, made cheerful. "Now are ye light in the Lord." Depression gave way to buoyancy. Melancholy yielded to cheerfulness. They became the optimists. One has sometimes seen the windows of a little cottage which faces the sun, shine like burnished gold, as they caught the glory of the resplendent orb. Every window pane was "lightened" as it confronted the radiant glory. And so with depressed souls and their Maker. If we bring ourselves face to face with the Sun of Righteousness, and remain in the fruitful attitude, contemplating "as in a mirror the glory of the Lord," we shall be "transformed into the same image from glory to glory." And "their faces were not ashamed.'' There was the light of conquerors in their eyes. The cloud of anticipated defeat was dispersed. "Their faces were covered with joy, but not with blushes." They were "children of the light."

Let us now turn to the third of these witnesses, and hear his thankful confession. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." And what had been this man's peculiar burden? It is described under the spacious word "troubles." It is possible, perhaps, to give a little more definiteness to its content. It is literally suggestive of "tightness." He had been in a "tight corner," "a tight place." He hadn't known how to turn; he was shut in, in straits and imprisonment. We are not told what particular shape the affliction had taken. It is sufficient to us to know that the man was at bay, and could discover no means of escape. In his straits he "cried unto the Lord." It was a short, sharp, urgent prayer. There is a phrase in one of Rutherford's letters which it may be useful to quote just here. "Fervour is a heavenly ingredient in prayer; an arrow drawn with full strength hath a speedier issue; therefore the prayers of saints are expressed by crying in Scripture." This was the kind of arrow- prayer that sprang from the tense feelings of this imprisoned soul. Again we have the confession made by an earlier witness. "The Lord heard him," paid heed to him, and began the ministry of gracious response. "He saved him out of all his troubles" He opened a way out of the tight place. He led him out of straits into freedom. He gave him a sense of space. "Thou hast brought my feet into a large place."

It is little wonder that testimonies like these, leaping out of grateful hearts, should find their issue in a song which is both Gospel and praise! "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him." The witnesses are generalising their own experiences, and proclaiming a Gospel for all men. The Lord of all is willing to become the life-guard of each. He will pitch His tents round about us, and within those gracious defences our security will become complete. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people." Behind those glorious ramparts the man of "fears" may find deliverance, the man of depression may find "lightening," and the man of troubles may discover a wealthy freedom.