

THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES

NO. 1218

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“They considered not the miracle of the loaves.”
Mark 6:52

LET us, with deep attention, consider the miracle of the loaves, lest we fall into the same evil as that which happened to the disciples in the text. When they saw Jesus walking on the sea, “They were sore amazed in themselves and wondered: for they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened.”

Hard hearts and painful unbeliefs spring up in the waste places where we bury our forgotten mercies. The miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ ought to be considered. They are not trifles, and they ought not to be passed over as if they were the mere common-places of a daily newspaper. Everything that has to do with the Son of God is a fit subject for the deepest study, and all His sayings and works should be sought out by them that have pleasure therein.

Neither earth nor heaven, time nor eternity, yield choicer gems of thought than the achievements of our Lord. Remember, since Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, what He did at one time ought to be well-considered, because it is the index of what He is prepared to do *again* should the need arise.

Still would He sooner feed His own sheep by a miracle than allow them to lack any good thing. His accomplished wonders have not spent His strength—He has the dew of His youth still upon Him. Our Samson’s locks are not shorn. Our Solomon has not lost His wisdom. Our Immanuel has not ceased to be “God with us.”

If the disciples had considered the miracle of the loaves, they would have observed that Christ is grand in emergencies. When there were five thousand people to be fed, and no towns and villages near enough to supply them with bread, so that the people must faint by the way ere they could reach the markets, then Christ was ready, full-handed in time of scarcity, prompt to dispense His liberality, able to meet the emergency so perfectly that the people must have been very thankful that such an emergency had arisen. And no doubt, often wished that they could have been in such a strait again if they could have had the Lord near to bring them out of it.

Had they considered the miracle of the loaves, the disciples would have known that Christ is not only grand at emergencies, but that He displays His power spontaneously, without need of pressing or even prompting. Before anybody else had cared for the multitude, He began inquiring about the state of the stores from which the famishing must be fed.

He it was who thought of the way of feeding them—it was a design invented and originated by Himself. His followers had looked at their little store of bread and fish, and given up the task as hopeless. But Jesus, altogether unembarrassed, and in no perplexity, had already considered how He would banquet the thousands and make the fainting sing for joy. The Lord of Hosts needed no entreaty to become the Host of Hosts of hungry men.

Remembering this, the disciples, in their new distress should have said within themselves, “Now will He display His power. We have scarcely need to cry to Him, for before we call, He will answer. And while the emergency is yet pressing upon our minds, He will hear.”

But they forgot what He had done on that occasion, and therefore they fell into distrust as to their new trial. Beloved, is not this a very common fault with us? Do we not too oft forget what the Lord has done for us in times past? We sing so rightly—

*“His love in time past forbids me to think
He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.”*

But do we not forget those Ebenezers? Do we not very frequently suffer our memory to let His benefits go? Is not depression of spirit occasioned by the fact that we do not well-consider the miracle of the loaves or its counterpart which has taken place in our history?

How many times have I sought the Lord in sorest trouble and He has brought me through! What burdens have I carried to Him and found them vanish! What wants has He not supplied? What marvels has He not wrought on my behalf? Surely, if I think of what He has done for me, I shall not, unless my heart be hardened, permit myself to be afraid.

Cannot many of you say the same? Are there not oases in your pilgrimage through the desert which, as you look back upon them, are to your grateful memory very green and full of sunlight, where the Lord revealed Himself to you and wrought very mightily for you? Consider, then, the miracle of the loaves as it has transpired in your own life story, and be not afraid, whatever your present trouble may be.

At the present time, I shall not consider the miracle of the loaves in the form of a sermon, but allow our discourse to take the shape of a little friendly talk.

I. Come, let us think a little, first, about THE GUESTS who gathered around our Lord when He wrought the miracle of the loaves.

And we are struck, first, with *their great number*. Jesus had His feast days, when He kept open house and entertained His guests in unusual crowds. Twice, especially, He held very remarkable feasts, and His banquets were distinguished for the number that came to them. Here were five thousand men, and on another occasion some four thousand men, besides women and children—and I should think that is a very large “besides,” for the women and children may possibly have outnumbered the men—at least they often do so in our congregations nowadays.

This was feasting on an imperial scale. In the present instance, five thousand gathered together, and all were as easily provided for as if there had been but five. Should we not *consider* this point, and argue from it that the Lord Jesus will feed our hungry souls if we come to Him?

Should we not each one say, then, “If I am a soul wanting His love and mercy, surely He can bless me? Are there a great many saved already? Are hundreds pressing to the Savior at this very hour? Then why should I be shut out? He who could feed five thousand, could certainly feed five thousand and one. One, more or less could make no difference at so great a feast. Nay, I am quite certain Jesus can supply me, for He had twelve baskets left after He had fed all the host. Come, my soul, if you are hungering after Christ, do not stand back as though you would be one too many. The more the merrier. The more that come to His Gospel-banquet, the more pleased Jesus is.”

Some religionists are in raptures with the text, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, and few there be that find it.” They dwell upon the words, “*few* there be that find it,” with an evident gusto and self-appreciation, something like the old Conservative voter when he denounced household suffrage and gloried in his own monopoly.

Such thoughts are not according to the mind of Christ. He did not say, “I will feed five hundred out of these people, and the rest may starve.” But in the mighty bounty of His heart, the greatness of their number, and the direness of their need, moved Him to come forward and supply them all. Had there been fifty, they might have gone home as on other occasions, for fifty might possibly have found food in the villages. But the needs of five thousand required a divine supply.

The greatness of the number of sinners seems both to encourage our Lord to act in mercy, and to make it divinely fit that He should act. For by His knowledge shall He justify *many* and bring *many* sons unto glory. Let no sinner ever be troubled with the dread that he would be one too many at the banquet

of mercy. Neither let him fear that he will be an intruder. Christ's banqueting-hall was an open field—there were no walls or doors, or persons guarding the entrance—thus free is His feast of love at this moment. Whosoever will, let him come.

We note next, *the strange character of His guests*. We do not know what sort of people they were, but this we do know, He did not exempt one because of any flaw in his character. They were a nondescript multitude. Little good could be said of them, except that they had an ear to hear Jesus preach, and were especially glad if the sermon was the first course, with loaves and fishes for the second. They were a carnal people, and had nothing about them that deserved our Lord's consideration.

But when did Jesus Christ wait until men deserved it before He blessed them? When we give alms, we think it meet to make inquiries about the deserving characters of those who apply to us for relief, and I suppose we must do so, or we shall do mischief. But our heavenly Father sends his rain both upon the just and upon the unjust, and even so, our Lord Jesus Christ feeds these people, though many of them were mere loafers and hangers on. Bad or good, the generous Savior fed them.

It could not hurt them to have a bit of bread and fish to eat, a gift of food which people eat before our eyes is generally safe charity, and so the Master fed them. Let me, then, say to myself, I may be very unworthy and am, and my character may have nothing about it to commend it to the Lord Jesus Christ. But why should He not feed me with the food that is necessary for my soul?

Has He not come into the world to save sinners? Did He not visit this world as a physician to heal the sick? Let not my unworthiness keep me back. Want of merit did not exclude one person from the miracle of the loaves, and it need not exclude me, for He bids me come. Unworthy as I am, He invites me freely, repeatedly, earnestly—yea, He commands me to come. Why, then, should I hesitate? If there be many, I will be one among them. And if they be of all kinds, I may the more freely join them.

These guests had one thing in common, which I have no doubt will be found among us also—they *were all hungry and they were all poor*. They could not supply one single dish for the table. Not one of them had a loaf to contribute nor a fish to give to the Master of the feast. They were all hungry, but not one could produce a crust. And the Lord neither asked them to contribute nor repelled them because of their poverty.

Am I, then, tonight, an empty sinner, having no good in myself? Do I feel that I could not contribute even one perfect thought, much less one solitary perfect action to the stores of the Redeemer's merit? Nevertheless, He bids me come, and I will come. He is a great giver. I can only be a receiver, and my utter lack of all goodness fits me to receive from Him, since the emptier the vessel the more it can receive.

If I could help Him, there would be no need for Him to work a miracle on my account, but since I can bring nothing whatsoever, I need His miraculous power. As I see Him feeding hungry souls, I will join in with the rest and partake of the fruit of His compassion. They were a penniless, foodless people, and could not help themselves, but there was One who could help them all, and afford that help with ease. And so, tonight, whatever our hearts' necessities may be, Jesus is here to enrich us, and to do it in a manner which will manifest the boundless nature of His love and grace.

On one of these occasions, we read that *there were women and children among them*. Now, I must confess myself I am not partial to very small children coming into the congregation. I am glad to see their mothers, and if they cannot come without bringing their infants, I am glad that they should bring them. But they certainly are not an improvement to a congregation, as a rule.

Yet here they were—here were women and children, and I suppose that some of the children were very closely connected with the women by being carried in their arms, because they are described as "*women and children*." They were all fed, and that would stop their crying. They were all supplied, however little they might be.

And should not this be a great encouragement to me if I am seeking Christ, that if I be no better than a little crying child that might seem to be a nuisance in God's family, or if I am a person so poor, so ill-

clad, that I may seem to myself to be as much out of place in a congregation as a crying babe, yet nevertheless, the bounties of divine grace are as much for me as for others.

Jesus would not have it said that He had no food for the children. He would not have the mothers go home and say, "The big men had their food, but we had only a few bones and broken scraps, and the poor dear children had none at all." In Christ's feasts, there is no complaining of the widows as in apostolic days. None are neglected in the general ministration when Jesus presides. But whosoever will may come and partake of the bounties which the King of heaven has prepared for every hungry, thirsty soul.

So much about the guests. May these suggestions be blessed by the Holy Spirit to induce some hungry sinner to join with the rest of the company, and feast on free grace.

II. The next thing we will consider in the miracle of the loaves is THE ORDERLINESS OF THE GUESTS.

There were five thousand, but they sat down in ranks by hundreds and by fifties. I wonder how they were marshaled so well? Oh, I remember, the Lord of Hosts was there, and He knows how to marshal armies. But how was it that they were willing to sit in ranks? People are not always so willing to be ordered about, and when they are hungry, they are often very disobedient.

But they sat down as they were told to do, and sat down in rows, so that they were divided with little aisles between them. The original word, used by Mark, represents them as divided like beds of flowers, with walks between, so that as a gardener can go up and down and water all the plants, so the waiters at the feast could conveniently give every man his share of bread, and his piece of fish without confusion. They sat down in ranks by fifties and by hundreds.

Things do not look so orderly now, do they, as we see Christ, through His church, feeding the multitudes? There is a good work going on in the north of England, there is a revival in Scotland, there is an awakening in Ireland, there is a stir in the midland counties. But does it not look very much like a scramble? Do we not seem to tumble over one another instead of doing our work in soldierly order?

A good work springs up in one place on a sudden, while religion is dying out in other quarters. The people are satiated yonder, and are starving only a little way off. We do not get at the masses as a whole, or see the church progress in all places. Let us not, however, judge too hastily, for Jesus makes *His* order out of *our* disorder.

We see a piece of the puzzle, but when the whole shall be put together, and we shall see the end from the beginning, I warrant you we shall see that Christ's great feast of mercy, with its myriads of guests, has been conducted on a principle of order as mathematically accurate as that which guides the spheres in their courses.

God has laid down in the book of His everlasting purposes, written by Him of old, everything that shall occur in the great economy of His grace, and from that He never swerves. His purposes ripen at the proper time, and His plans are carried out according to the wisest method. Providence, which so often looks wild and blustering, is not so by any means—it is working in harmony with grace for the salvation of as many as Christ has bought with His most precious blood, and for the accomplishment of the grand intentions of electing love.

The raising up of this minister and of that, the building of this house of prayer and that, and even the bringing of a certain number of people at one time to listen, and the bringing of such and such persons rather than others, and the moving of the preacher's heart to speak in this wise and not in that, and to dwell upon that subject and not upon the other—all these things are so ordered that, when the story of the Lord's great grace-banquet shall be told, we shall say to ourselves, "It could not have been better. He has done all things well."

While we shall have to admire the grandeur of the works of grace as seen in the number of the saved, we shall also admire the orderliness of it in the way in which these saved ones were separated to Jesus by the right means, at the right time, and in the right place, in such a way as to bring the utmost possible glory to God.

I like to think this over sometimes, not that we may quiet ourselves when we do not see numbers saved, nor that we may ever grow indifferent to the great multitudes who remain unconverted. But that we may rest assured that our God is not disappointed, that His plans are not frustrated, and that, after all, the Gospel is not preached in vain.

You must not think, dear brother, because for a little while you have been preaching the Gospel apparently without success, that there will be a deficit somewhere in God's account at the end of the chapter. You must not dream that, because in certain countries the Gospel light burns dimly, God is foiled and defeated.

When the book of God's purposes shall be all unfolded in actual history, there will be found no blots, mistakes, and blunders there. He knows the end from the beginning, and His purposes shall be fulfilled in every jot and tittle, and in nothing shall the glory of God be marred.

Though Satan may be laughing now, and every now and then, the men of the world may boast against the people of God, it shall not be so in the close of the affair. But it shall be said of the entire matter, it was a grand banquet of mercy and it was ordered well, and Christ the great Head of the house made a divine display of His munificent mercy in causing the multitude to taste of His grace."

Our duty, I believe, is to urge the people to sit down and receive the Word. And the duty of the sinner is, especially when he comes to hear the Gospel preached, to sit in the attitude of expectancy, desiring to obtain the blessing. I like the thought of those people all sitting down, although I wonder some of them did not say, "I shall not sit down. Pooh! feed me with two fishes and five loaves? I could eat the whole. Feed all this multitude that way? I shall not sit down. Preposterous! Ridiculous!"

One is surprised that somebody or other did not get up and say, "No, no, no, we are not to be befooled after this fashion. Show us the table, and show us something on it to sit down to, and then we will sit down, but not else."

Let us be always confident that when God inclines the people's hearts to come expecting a blessing, and to wait upon Him for it, it is then that the blessing comes. I could not imagine the five thousand sitting there waiting to be fed, and Christ not feeding them. Could you conceive such a thing? Their sitting down in expectancy laid a sacred compulsion upon the divine compassion, to which it gladly yielded.

Oh, soul, if you sit down in your hunger before Christ, and say, "Lord, I know You can feed me. I expect You to feed me. By faith, I open wide my mouth that I may eat of Your flesh and drink of Your blood"—then assuredly you shall be fed. Never was such a soul sent empty away. If you believe in Him so as to accept of Him, *you have Him*. Rejoice in Him!

Enough, then, about the order of the feast.

III. And now, a little about THEIR FARE.

They had bread and fish. Jesus seems to have made that His standing bill of fare whenever He spread a banquet—bread and fish. They once gave *Him* a piece of honeycomb, but He seems always to have given them bread and fish. Bread was enough, was it not? Yes, enough, but not enough for Him to give, for He loves to supply a little more than enough. He would give a relish as well as a sufficiency—there was bread *and fish*.

When Jesus Christ makes feasts for souls He gives them sufficiency—bread, all that they can want, all the necessities for their souls' life. Giving a sufficiency, He also gives excellency—He gives fish, there shall be savor and delight, and peace with God. You shall not say, "He has given me workhouse fare—He doles out by half-ounces exactly what I want, but He helps me to no sweet morsels, no fat things full of marrow."

No, you shall have more than you actually want. You shall find in your dish a secret something which will sweeten all, and many other precious things of which you shall sing, "He satisfieth my mouth with good things."

Jesus might have called some of the people close to Him and given them bread and fish, and then have fed the next row with bread only, but He did not do so. He gave bread and fish all round, and it is

very sweet to think that all souls that come to Christ get the same spiritual food—and if they do not eat in the same measure, it is their own fault, not His. For every promise that is in the Word of God is for every soul that believes in Him, save only where some promises are reserved for spiritual attainments, and then those spiritual attainments are to be sought after and may be reached by all the family.

Oh, chief of sinners, if you come to Jesus, there is the same love in His heart for you as for the chief of saints. Oh, least and weakest, and feeblest of all who believe in Jesus, there is the same covenant mercy and covenant blessing for you as for Paul or Peter. Bread and fish He gave to all who came to His table, and even so there is a uniformity of spiritual meat for all His brethren. Jesus is the same precious Christ to all His people.

What suitable food it was! Other kinds of food might have been either distasteful or indigestible to a considerable number, but bread and fish would surely suit all palates and all conditions. They might all be satisfied with such light and yet substantial food, and probably they all were so. And here was the beauty of it—they did all eat *and were filled*.

It was the right fare and a most agreeable fare. And there was so much of it that though they ate much, as I have no doubt they did, for they were very hungry, for they had been all day listening to sermons—and that is hungry work—still, for all that, there was enough for them, yea, enough and to spare.

Gospel provisions are adapted to all needs. Gospel provisions are plentiful, and are liberally given forth to all who come for them. Gospel provisions are sweet and pleasant to those who participate in them. Gospel provisions will satisfy the most eager appetites.

Come hither, you hungry soul, you who have been to Moses, and from him obtained nothing but the stony law. Come and eat the bread of heaven. Come, poor sinner, you who have been to the pleasures of sin, and found nothing there but the husks that the swine eat, come to Jesus, and He will fill you to the full with a diviner meat.

But we must pass on, having noticed the guests, their order, and their fare, to notice the waiters.

IV. THE WAITERS at this feast were the disciples.

Not the apostles, I think, merely, but the disciples—all of them. They each came and received a portion, and handed it round to the hundreds and the fifties. What a blessed thing it is that Jesus Christ has not taken upon Himself to call all His people by His grace apart from instrumentality. He might have done so if He had chosen. The blessed Spirit does not stand in any need of us—it is His condescension which leads Him to employ us.

He might have sent the Bible into the world, and the only part we might have been permitted to take in it might have been the printing of it, the giving of it away, or the selling of it—and there it might have been left. But instead thereof He uses the living voice, the living example, and the pious persuasions of His own quickened disciples.

And what an honor this is! What a privilege this is! I am sure I should have been very delighted that day to help to pass round the bread and the fish—and would not you? It is one of the greatest pleasures you can have in life to feed a hungry man. If you have ever done it, you all know that there is a look about his eyes, and a joy in the manner of his eating, which makes you whisper to others, “I wish you would come and see him eat.” It gives you pleasure to see his pleasure. If he is very hungry, every mouthful is sweet to him, and you feel a sympathy with his gladness as his wants are supplied.

What delightful work it must have been to serve out that bread and fish. But oh, to preach the Gospel! To preach the Gospel when God is blessing it to sinners! I have just finished twenty-one years of preaching to this congregation, and they have been twenty-one years of toil, especially as the sermons have been printed every week. But I would not change the work for any conceivable occupation, or the happiness of preaching the Gospel for any happiness except that of seeing Jesus face to face. And I really do not know that I wish for that till I have done preaching the Gospel. For if souls are to be saved, I would far rather tarry here to help in it than go to heaven itself.

Oh, the joy it gives you to see men saved! Have I not seen them sometimes in the vestry when I have talked with them and prayed with them, and they have risen from their knees, and said, “I see it, sir, I understand it now. I never saw it before. I am a saved man, I believe in Jesus, I know He is my Savior.”

If a man finds joy in having made £10,000 in business, he may keep his joy. I would sooner have the bliss of winning one soul for Christ. There is an intense satisfaction in soul-winning. These are the things George Herbert would have said, that make music in our bosoms when we lie awake at nights. These are the things that make it sweet to live, and even sweet to die, if we may feed poor hungry souls with the bread of heaven.

Now, I want all of you who love the Lord and have tasted of what He provides to busy yourselves with supplying others. I wish we had more young men coming forward to enter into the Christian ministry, that more would devote their strength and talents to the preaching of the Gospel. But at the same time, we ought to have more persons busying themselves in the school, more talking about Jesus Christ in their various families, more friends who would open their rooms for prayer meetings, more who would in some way or other try to get at the hungry world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“Well,” says one, “but we must not push too much nor become intrusive.” We do not find that any disciple labored under that fear. No one intrudes on a hungry man if he brings him bread to eat. And if the hungry man should be so unkind as to call it intrusion, I have no doubt that after he has been fed, he will be very grieved with himself for having said so, and he whom he reproached will readily accept the apology.

Go you and intrude yourselves, my brethren, among the hungry, with the bread of heaven. Intrude yourselves between the living and the dead, as Aaron did with his smoking censor. Intrude yourselves in the valley of dry bones, and cry aloud unto them, “Thus saith the LORD, ye dry bones, live.” Intrude yourselves as Christ intruded into a world which despised and rejected Him, to whom, after all, He is the only Savior.

V. We are getting on with our consideration of the miracle, for we have seen the fare, and the waiters. Now let us go a step farther, namely, to THE BLESSING.

There they sit all hungry, and the waiters are all ready, but our Lord will not proceed till He has worshipped and rendered thanks. There is something in His glance and gesture—He looked up to heaven. What did that mean? “O Father, these loaves and fishes are Yours. You have given them to us. We thank You for them. And now, O Father, the power to make these sufficient for the emergency comes from heaven, vouchsafe it, we pray You.”

Brethren, always give that look upward before you begin your work. Say, “Lord, here am I, a poor nobody, trying to teach others, and to bring souls to Christ. For what I am, I thank You, for I am that by Your grace, but if I am to be useful, You must make me so. Lord, I look up with the hope that You will look down.”

After our Lord had looked up to heaven, we find that He blessed, and then He brake the loaves. Jesus must bless our labor or it will be fruitless. *He* could bless the bread for Himself, but *we* must look away from ourselves for the blessing. May Jesus bless you all, and He will if you look up, and say, “Lord, bless us.”

Always do that on Sabbath-days, especially, for those are great settled feasts of the Lord. Ask the Lord to bless what the preacher is going to say, and then it will be made profitable to you. After the blessing comes the distribution, but not till then. Oh, for more looking up to God, for in Him lies our strength.

Oh, for more praying, there can never be too much of that. If we stopped every evangelistic service for awhile, and ceased from all teaching and preaching, in order to spend a season in crying mightily unto the Lord, it might be the quickest way of doing the Lord’s work. Pauses for prayer are not delays. Prayerless haste makes ill speed.

VI. Now came the work itself—THE EATING.

The disciples distributed the bread and the fish as quickly as they could, and the people began to eat. They all ate of the provision, and they were all filled. Now, what should every soul here conclude, but this—if Jesus has provided spiritual meat, He has not provided it to be looked at. He has not set it before us that we may merely hear about it. He has provided it that it might all of it be eaten.

What is there for me? Lord, I am hungry, grant me a meal. Oh, souls, if you would hear sermons with the view of knowing what there is in them for yourselves—that you might feed upon them—what blessed work it would be to preach to you! But we hold up the bread of heaven, and descant upon its excellencies, and tell you of its sweetness, and persuade you to taste and see how good it is—and then we have the unhappiness of seeing you turn your backs both upon it and upon the great Lord of the feast, and you go your way as if you cared neither for Him nor for His bounties.

The disciples had not this sorrow to distress them. None of the multitude refused the Lord's provision. The miracle of the loaves and fishes would have been a poor, lame business if the crowds had not eaten of the food so wondrously supplied. What, Jesus Christ a Savior and no sinner saved! Christ a physician and no sick one healed! It were a sorry business. We must have the sinners saved, and the sick ones healed, or Jesus is not honored.

Ought not this to encourage all of you to lay hold upon Christ, because He is set forth on purpose to be laid hold upon? Ought not this to encourage you to feast upon Him, because He must have been meant to be fed upon? If you put two canaries in a cage tonight, and in the morning when they wake they see a quantity of seed in a box, what will the birds do? Will they stop and ask what the seeds are there for? No, but they each reason thus—"Here is a little hungry bird, and there is some seed. These two things go well together." And straightway they eat.

Even thus, if you were in your right senses, and had not been perverted by sin, you would say, "Here is a Savior, and here is a sinner—these two things go well together. Dear Savior, save me, a sinner. Here is a feast of mercy, and here is a hungry sinner. What can that feast be for but for the hungry, and I am such. Lord, I will even lay to at this blessed festival of Yours, and unless You come and tell me to be gone, I will feast till I am full."

Did you ever know of Jesus say to a sinner, "*You* have no right here"? No, but it is written, "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out." No one was upbraided for eating that day, or for eating too much. Neither will any sinner ever be blamed for taking hold upon Christ, or for taking too hearty a hold upon Him.

Come and take Him, O anxious one, and the more fully you can take Him, the more will Jesus be pleased. Why flows the river but to make glad your fields? Why sparkles the fountain but to quench your thirst? Why shines the sun but for your eyes to be blest with his light? As you breathe the air around you, because you feel it must have been made for you to breathe, so receive the full, free salvation of Jesus Christ, because it is provided and you are in need of it.

No mandate of heaven exists to shut you out, but every sacred doctrine is an argument why you should come, and welcome, and take Jesus freely. The crowds all ate. None were so obstinate as to decline the gratis provender. Did they receive the bread which perishes? I charge you, then, accept gladly the bread which endures to life eternal.

VII. Now, when they had all eaten, there came the CLEANING UP.

There must be a cleaning up after every banquet. They went round and gathered up the fragments that remained, and found twelve baskets full. This, as has often been remarked, teaches us economy in everything that we do for God—not economy as to giving *to* Him, but as to the use of the Lord's money. Break your alabaster boxes and pour out the sacred nard with blessed wastefulness, for that very wastefulness is the sweetness of the gift.

But when God entrusts you with any means to use for Him, use those means with discretion. When we have money given to us for use in God's cause, we should be more careful with it than if it were our own. And the same rule applies to other matters. Ministers, when God gives them a good time in their studies, and they read the Word and it opens up before them, should keep notes of what comes to them

The wind does not always blow alike, and it is well to grind your wheat when the mill will work. You should put up your sails, and let your barque fly along when you have a good, favoring breeze—and this may make up for dead calms. Economically put by the fragments that remain after you have fed next Sunday's congregation, that there may be something for hard times, when your head aches, and you are dull and heavy in pulpit preparations.

But I think the beauty of it was this, that after they had all been fed, there was *something left*. Did I hear a heavy heart complain—"I hear of a great revival, and a great blessing, but I was not there. I was just gone out of the town when that blessing came. Woe's me, I am too late." Ah, there is plenty left. No penitent sinner is too late.

Sometimes friends come in at the end of a meal, and there is nothing left beyond the bare bones, but here is quite enough for you. Here are twelve baskets full to the brim. You are not too late. Come and welcome. Peter, bring some of that bread and fish. You have a whole basketful, hand it out. Let this poor, latecomer have his portion. What if the revival did miss you, and what if the Sabbath sermon did not bless you, though it blest so many! Nevertheless, come along, there is something left.

And there is this to be remarked, too, that there was *something left for the waiters*. The five thousand did all eat, but there were twelve apostles who managed the distribution, and they have a basketful each to themselves. That was more than they had when they began. They had each a basketful.

Many a time we, who are the waiters upon you in the Gospel feast, do not get so much as you do. I have sometimes on Sabbath day likened myself to a butcher who is selling his meat. This person comes for a joint, and that customer carries away a round of beef, while a third has a sirloin. Thus, I have dealt out the meat of the Gospel, while I have been very hungry myself. There seemed to be nothing for me, but the chopper and the block.

Is it not so occasionally with you teachers in your classes? Have you not found it so, you preachers in the street? You tread out the corn, but are as starved as muzzled oxen. It shall not always be so. Go on feeding the people, and you shall sit down afterwards—a great basketful will remain for you at the end.

I remember a good story of one of our young brethren from the College. He preached one Sabbath afternoon what he thought to himself was a dull, powerless sermon. He was going away very much discouraged, when an aged minister said to him, "My dear brother, there are two tokens that God can give you of your being called, and they are such as He gave to Gideon. He can make the fleece wet while all the barn floor around is dry, or he can reverse the token, and He can make all the ground wet while the fleece is dry. Now, which token would you like to have?"

"Oh, sir," said the young man, "I see what you are driving at. If I could but hope that all the people were wet, this afternoon, I would not mind being dry myself." We may well choose, my brethren, to be dry fleeces if all our hearers are wet with the dew of heaven. I like the sign best to come as a wet fleece and a wet barn floor too, and when the Lord gives that it is a favor indeed.

Such was the divine largesse in this case. He gave the food for the five thousand, and the twelve basketfuls for those who waited on them, so that not a grumbler went away, nor a latecomer had to say, "There was none for me," nor a waiter missed his share.

Now, brethren, cannot you believe that if fifty thousand men had come trooping up that hill just then—if every blade of grass on that mountain had suddenly turned into a man, and if from among the brake, and the heather, and the bushes, and the stones, a great multitude such as that which shall gather on the judgment day, had all started up on a sudden, and they had all come and sat round the Savior, He would have still stood there and multiplied the loaves and the fishes right away, and continued giving to His disciples till every one was filled?

Sure I am that if all London should come to Jesus they would find enough in Him for them. If all my fellow countrymen, ay, and all the human race that dwell upon the face of the earth, should be moved to come crowding around the Savior, there would be no fear of exhausting His power to save. We should not even have to hesitate for a moment, but still to stand and preach the Gospel to every creature, still using, in the power of the Holy Ghost, the same cry, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved."

Come, then, weary, hungry sinner. You have nothing to do but to take Christ. You have not to bake the bread, or broil the fish. The bread and fish are broken, blest, and ready. Open your mouth and enjoy the food. Faith to receive what Christ provides is all that is needed. Lord grant it.

Take salvation freely. Freely Jesus gives it to you. Take it, and God bless you. And if you have never had Christ before, and you get Him tonight, you will have a happy future, after the sort that we read of in the Bible, when “they began to be merry.” Come, for all things are ready. Turn not away. God bless you, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark 6:30-56

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—488, 500, 504

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