

BREAD FOR THE HUNGRY

NO. 418

A SERMON
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“And he humbled you and suffered you to hunger and fed you with manna, which you knew not, neither did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread only but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD does man live.”
Deuteronomy 8:3.

THIS notable text shall teach us two lessons this morning. Its first utterance shall be concerning *providence* and its second, concerning the *life of grace in the heart*. Our blessed Lord once used this text with regard to providence and therefore we shall be justified in so interpreting it. When the foul fiend suggested to the hungry Savior that He should work a “preposterous miracle” to supply His needs, saying, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread,” the Master met him, not with the wooden sword of human reason, but with this true Jerusalem blade, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, replying to him, “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Our glorious David took this smooth and shining stone out of the clear and silvery brook of Scripture and threw it at Goliath’s head—an example to us to meet temptations with the weapons of Scripture, not with the words or traditions of men!

I. Let us for one moment, that we may get the meaning of this text, with regard to PROVIDENCE, reflect upon the children of Israel in the wilderness.

They were an exceeding great host, numbering somewhere between two and three millions. They had come forth out of Egypt on a sudden. They were poor, they were not therefore in circumstances to provide themselves with food even for a long march, much less for forty years. They had each of them brought what food they had, for we read, “They took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders.” They crossed the Red Sea by miracle. Very soon afterwards, all their provisions must have been exhausted.

Picture their position—the kneading troughs are empty, the sterile wilderness of Sin can hardly yield blades of grass enough for their flocks. How could it provide them with any sustenance for themselves? They have a long journey before them and where have they to look? There is no possibility of commerce by which to purchase food, neither can the land yield any. Every door is shut save one and that is the door of heaven.

All means have failed, but the God who works with the means can work without them if He pleases and therefore He opens the windows of heaven and instead of a shower of rain, there is a shower of food. A substance like coriander seed fell round about the camp, “manna,” so they called it, for they were not sure what it was. They gathered it, they found it dainty to the taste, exceedingly nourishing and wholesome, and they fed upon this bread of heaven for forty years. Nor did the manna cease till they came unto the land of Canaan, where they ate the corn of the land and had no need of miraculous supplies.

The hunger which was thus supplied had its design, for, as hunger tames the wild and savage beast, so this was sent to humble the proud and carnal minds of the Israelites—an object of no mean importance. But that was not the only lesson. The Lord taught them that the sustaining power by which man’s life is preserved, is not necessarily in any one substance, but is dependent upon the Word of God.

It is true that bread nourishes and the philosopher would say that there is a nutritive power resident in it. But really, there is no power of any sort anywhere but in God. The power of nourishing and

sustaining bodily life is of God and He, by a continual flowing of His omnipotence, pours the nutritive quality into bread, but if He chose to, He could pour it into stones. If it were His will, He could make the very dust of the earth nutritious and supply the lack of man by new means, for He is no more shut up to bread now than He was in times that have gone by.

naturalists speak of laws of nature—there is no power in a law, write it as you like, it has no power. The laws of nature are simply the Lord operating in a certain manner, producing certain effects by certain means. This is what we call law—it is God in action—and the reason why bread sustains the body is because God puts His potency into it, by which it receives nutritive virtues and the body is sustained.

Now, the Lord, by the manna, said to the children of Israel, “Man is not fed by bread alone. He is fed by God’s power that comes from Him into the bread and when the bread is lacking, He can infuse that power into the very dews of the night and they, as they distil, shall become manna full of nutritive energy, to sustain your frame, and you shall know that the power to nourish is not in the second cause, but in the great first cause, not in the corn, not in the bread, but in the Lord God Himself.” This was the lesson which they were required to learn.

Now, brethren, this is a doctrine which may be rendered exceedingly useful to us. God has power to supply our needs and therefore there can be no necessity for us to do wrong in order that we may be fed, for He is not tied to any means. He can supply the needs of His children, not in one way, but in fifty ways. Nay, not in fifty ways, but in ways as countless as the sands upon the sea shore.

You know how in olden times the Lord occasionally showed this power in miracles. When Moses, Elijah and our great Lord Himself, fasted forty days, their natural lives were sustained without food. How was this? We cannot tell the exact mode, but we can think of several methods. He could have done it by modifying the exhausting processes of nature. He could bid those powers which consume material, work at a slower rate and whereas the body now expends itself daily by ounces, he could make it expend itself by drachms or minute parts. He could prevent, as it were, the furnace of human life from consuming its coal and yet the vital spark need not be quenched.

Or if He pleased, He could give the material necessary for the maintenance of the frame by miraculous means. He could fit and square the stones for the temple of the body and put them in their place without those masons—the teeth, or those builders—the digestive organs. He could give to the different secretive glands just that which they required and find, if it were necessary, the substances in the earth, or in the air, or in the sky, so that still, without the necessity for bread, man might live.

Or He could, if He chose to vary the miracle, increase the nutritive power of the food already received, as in Elijah’s case, so that a man might go in the strength of one day’s meat for forty days. At any rate, God has proved by miracle, that although He chooses to act usually according to certain rules and nourish the body with bread and with meat, yet He is not tied to rules, but is absolute King and Master and can do as He wills. Even in the subtle processes by which food is digested and assimilated to the flesh and blood, and bone and sinew, He can work without the means of ordinary chemistries. He can dissolve without distilling devices and fuse without crucibles.

“But” you say, “ah, that cannot concern us, for He never works miracles now.” Ay, but I reply, it is most marvelous for God to be able to do a miraculous thing without a miracle! Do you comprehend me? I think that the working of a miracle is not as wonderful as when that end is gained by ordinary laws and methods—gained without the cessation of any power in nature—simply by Providence overruling the powers just as they are. To be miraculous without miracles is the miracle of miracles.

I have seen many miracles which were not miracles, but yet all the more miraculous. The poor have lacked bread, stones were not turned into bread for them, but they had their bread as much by miracle, as if rocks had crumbled into food. We have seen the poor merchant reduced to distress and he said, “Now I cannot see any hope for me. God must rend His heavens and put His hand through the very windows to deliver me.” No heavens were rent, but the deliverance came.

Now, the Lord can this day without a miracle work such a miracle that we shall have all our wants supplied, for “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” You have heard the story of the martyr who was condemned to die. The judge said railingly, “You will be in prison. I shall make you no allowance for food and what can your God do for you? How can He feed you?” “Why,” said the poor prisoner, “if He wills it, He can feed me from your table,” and it was so, though unknown to his cruel judge, for until his day of burning came, the wife of the judge, touched with sympathy, always secreted food and fed him abundantly even from the persecutor’s board.

Perhaps you may have read in “Fox’s Acts and Monuments” the wonderful story of Mr. Samuel, who by the Bishop of Norwich was condemned to die. He was tied up by a chain about his middle and then condemned to starvation, having about two mouthfuls of bread and two or three drops of water each day until his frame became dry and shriveled. The pains of thirst and hunger were intense for some days, but after that he said he fell into a kind of swoon and he thought he heard a voice saying, “Fear not, Samuel, for from this day you shall never hunger nor thirst again.” And from that hour, though it was several days before he went to heaven in the fiery chariot from the stake, he never knew what it was to thirst or to hunger, though he had no greater supplies than before.

I have no doubt the physician would tell us it is possible that as nature will often after excessive pain become its own balm by deadening sensibility, so in this case, God was pleased not by miracles, but in the ordinary course of nature, to cast the man into a peculiar state in which he was not conscious of the wants of his body. And while, no doubt, all the ordinary operations were going on which cause hunger and thirst, yet he was not conscious of it and so the Lord was pleased without a miracle to work a miracle, proving that, “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

There are several very interesting illustrations of this great truth in the *Life of Mr. Henry Erskine*. “He was often in great straits and difficulties. Once when he and his family had supped at night, there remained neither bread, meal, flesh, nor money in the house. In the morning the young children cried for their breakfast and their father endeavored to divert them and did what he could at the same time to encourage himself and wife to depend upon that Providence that hears the young ravens when they cry.

While thus engaged, a countryman knocked hard at the door and called for someone to help him off with his load. Being asked whence he came and what he would have, he told them he came from Lady Reaburn with some provisions for Mr. Erskine. They told him he must be mistaken and that it was more likely to be for another Mr. Erskine in the same town. He replied, No, he knew what he said, he was sent to Mr. Henry Erskine and cried, ‘Come, help me off with my load, or else I will throw it down at the door.’ Whereupon, they took the sack from him and on opening it, found it well stored with fish and meat.

At another time, being in Edinburgh, he was so reduced that he had but three halfpence in his pocket. When he was walking about the streets, not knowing what course to steer, one came to him in a countryman’s habit, presented him with a letter in which were enclosed several Scotch ducatoons, with these words written, ‘Sir, receive this from a sympathizing friend. Farewell.’ Mr. Erskine never could find out whence the money came.

At another time, being on a journey on foot, his money failed and he was in danger of being reduced to distress. Having occasion to fix his walking-stick in some marshy ground among the rushes, he heard something tinkle at the end of it. It proved to be two half-crowns, which greatly assisted in bearing his charges home. In days of persecution and poverty, God wonderfully interposes for His people.”

I could myself write a Book of Providences quite as remarkable as William Huntingdon’s *Bank of Faith*. God does supply His people’s needs, this is not a matter of fancy or superstition, we have tried it and have proved it and we have as much evidence to prove that truth as to prove any fact which is taken for granted in science or in philosophy. Man does not to this day live by bread alone, not by ordinary channels of providence, but God does still supply the lack of His children, and none of them who trust in Him shall be desolate.

I have a consciousness that I am addressing someone this morning who little expected to be here, who nevertheless is in such straits that, though a Christian man, he is severely tempted and sternly tried by Satan to do what he knows is wrong, but which he thinks is necessary, because he says, “We must live.” My brother, let me influence you, as God’s ambassador, do not break a way for yourself. Stand still and see the salvation of God. It can never be right to do a wrong thing. This is a trial for your faith.

Oh! let not your faith fail you, but seek help from God this morning, that you may say, “I can starve, but I cannot sin.” And you may rest assured that God who delivered the three holy children out of the very midst of the fire, when they would not bow down before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up, will surely deliver you, and if not, yet let your resolution be still firmly fixed, “I will not do this great wickedness and sin against God.”

II. I now turn to the second part of the discourse. The text, evidently enough, has A SPIRITUAL BEARING.

Man shall not live by bread alone, that does but nourish the mere coarse fabric of clay, he lives by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God—that nourishes the immortal spirit, that sustains the heavenly flame which God has put there by the work of regeneration and conversion.

1. Now, in the first place, *the text speaks of a hunger and of its consequences.* Very many of you who are now present, understand what this hunger means. There was a time when the world suited us well enough—if we had enough to eat and to drink, and wherewithal we might be clothed like the rest of the Gentiles, this was all that we sought after. But suddenly, God put a new life into us, we knew not how.

The first evidence we had of that life was that we began to hunger, we were not satisfied, we were discontented, we were unhappy, we needed a something, we did not know what it was. But this we knew, that it was a something which we must have or die. The soul was conscience of sin and hungered for pardon, conscious of guilt and hungered for purity, conscious of absence from God, and hungered and thirsted after His presence. It was that blessed hunger which the Savior spoke of upon the Mount, when He said, “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

Now, speaking of that hunger, you that know of it, can bear witness, that it was a most *painful* thing when first we knew it. It was so painful to some of us that we could not rest. It was a hunger that pinched us in our sleep, in our business, in the fields, and in the streets. We cried, “Oh, that I knew where I might find Him. Oh, that I were saved!”

And we cried out, “Oh that,” and, “Would that,” and, “Ah!” and, “Oh!” Groanings that could not be uttered came up even from our soul after a something which we could not explain. We wanted Christ, we had come to know the meaning of that line of our hymn, “Give me Christ, or else I die.” What a painful hunger it was. Never did a starving wretch, who could count his bones and almost see through his hands, suffer more anguish than we knew when God had taken away from us the very staff of life and our soul was melted within us by reason of sore famine and straitness of bread.

Then that hunger, moreover, was utterly *insatiable*—nothing could stop it. Friends said, “You must take worldly amusement.” It was like endeavoring to fill a hungry man with shadows. The legalist said, “You must perform such-and-such duties.” It was like attempting to fill a soul with bubbles. Still our hunger cried like the horse-leech, “Give, give, give us something more substantial, more divine than this.” Oh! how some people try to appease hungry souls with music, pictures, riches, honors, fame. Poor fools! Did they once know what spiritual hunger means, they would renounce their idle and ridiculous attempts. None but Jesus, the bread of heaven, can satisfy a hungry soul. Happy are they who have hungered thus, but cursed are they who have never known what it is to hunger and thirst insatiably after Christ.

Next, this hunger is *impetuous*. Sometimes it will come at inconvenient seasons. Master Henry Smith—an old preacher at St. Paul’s cross, preaching upon the text, “As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby”—observes, “When hunger assails infants, they

neither regard leisure, nor necessity, nor willingness of their mothers, but all excuses and business set apart, as soon as they cry for food, they must be fed.”

So is it with a man who has begun to feel the need of Christ. It may be said to him, “You can have your religion at home. You do not want to be moping about the shop with it.” Ah! but he cannot help it. He is hungry and hunger knows no clock. It comes when it likes and having come, it will not be turned back. It is of no use saying, “When I have a more convenient season I will satisfy you.” But hunger says, “Now, now, now—I must eat, I must be fed.”

So is it with the truly hungry soul—it needs Christ *now*. If it is not Sunday, if it is not time to go up to worship, it longs to steal away into the cellar, or the attic, or anywhere that it may cry to God its heavenly Father and get some food, for its hunger is of that impetuous character—it is in season and out of season.

And then it is so impetuous, that the truly hungry soul is like a hungry man, of whom it is said in the proverb, “Hunger breaks through stone walls.” “Oh! it is a wet Sunday.” Ah! but the soul is hungry and must go, wet or dry. “Ay, but the streets are miry and muddy.” Well, but the soul is hungry and must go if it is knee-deep in mud. “Ay, but the place is far off.” If it were ten times as far, it must go. “Oh! but there is another place handy.” Yes, but that is the place where they sell philosophic plaster of paris and the soul says, “I cannot go to be fed on such stuff as that—I must go where there is milk for babes and bread for strong men.”

And then they will crowd the place where the bread of heaven is dispensed and some say, “Why do they crowd the place so?” Oh! if they knew how hungry the people were, they would not wonder. If there were a baker’s shop in the parish and all the people were starving, you would not marvel if you saw them crowd the door in the morning to get bread. It has been always so where the Lord sends a true Gospel ministry. The Lord never sends bread without sending mouths to eat it. Where the Word is preached, there will be ears to hear and hearts to receive it. It is no use to try to stop one of these hungry souls—they must have the Word which proceeds out of the mouth of God.

This hunger, I may add, is of an *increasing* character. The longer a man stays, the more hungry he gets—his hunger does not decline. Conviction of sin does not grow less and less, but sharper and sharper. Just as hunger gnaws and gnaws the very coats of the stomach, so does this spiritual hunger gnaw into the man’s heart.

He is wretched beyond expression, his cry grows shriller and more piercing, till he seems as if he would cut through heaven itself to get at what he wants. “Mercy, Lord, mercy, mercy, mercy!” And you may say to him, “Wherefore do you clamor thus?” His only answer will be, “Mercy, Lord, mercy, mercy! Give me Christ, give me Christ, or else I die!”

Now, what is the blessed result of this hunger? Why it makes a man humble. These hungry sinners are never proud, they have not the stomach to play the proud and haughty scorner. Souls that are filled with their own good works and puffed up with their own empty boastings—these high-stomached sinners can boast against Christ and His Gospel. But as for these hungry ones, they are willing to be anything and to do anything so that they may but be saved.

Now they love to hear the word “*grace*.” There was a time when they could not endure it, but now they are so hungry, that the word “*grace*” sounds like a bell, that summons them to their needed meals. Now, they love to hear of divine sovereignty, they are quite willing that God shall be King, so long as they may be but fed.

Now, they have no objection to election, if they may but have an interest in the covenant of grace. Now, they have no objection to justification by free grace by the righteousness of Christ, for they are emptied of anything of their own. They are humble and therefore they are in a proper state to receive Christ, for, “To this man will I look and with that man will I dwell, with him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembles at my word.”

Blessed hunger. You that do not have it today, may God soon satisfy you, He will do it sooner or later. And you who have had it, though I hope it will never be renewed to you in all its painfulness, yet I

pray that you may always be craving and longing, as new-born babes, desiring the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby.

2. And this brings me to notice, in the second place, *the heavenly bread and its surpassing excellence*. This bread, you see, is the Word of God. Now, the Word is given to us first here in the Bible, as it is written. It is given to us, secondly, from the lips of God's own chosen and appointed ambassadors. He who despises either of these two, will soon find himself growing lean in spirit. The Book, the Word, is like the flour, but the sermon is the bread, for it is through the sermon that the Word is, as it were, prepared for human palates and brought so that human souls may be able to receive it.

The moment the church of God shall despise the pulpit, God will despise her. It has been through the ministry that the Lord has always been pleased to revive and bless His churches and you will notice that these revivals in which it was boasted that there were no ministers engaged, have come to nought ere long, for those that stand, are those in which God gets to Himself glory and honor, by using instrumentality.

It is a wrong idea altogether, that God is glorified by putting instrumentality aside. That is not His glory. His glory is, that in our infirmity He still triumphs and that with His own right hand He is able to lay hold upon some jaw-bone of an ass and yet slay therewith heaps upon heaps of Philistines. It is the weakness of the instrumentality used that has a tendency to glorify God and hence He very seldom is pleased to work without some means or other. Most Christians, who have grown rich in grace, have been great frequenters of the house of prayer.

But now, why is it that we need this food at all? Why is it that we need the Word of God? I answer first, we need it to *sustain* the life which we have received. When God planted Eden, He did not leave it without watering it, for you read in Genesis, "There went up a mist to water the garden of Eden," and yet it is a very strange thing, and you ought to notice too, that God made the grass of the fields before He bade the sun, moon, and stars shine upon the earth, so there was the living thing before there was that upon which it was to depend for its sustenance, to show that He could maintain life without the external means, and that even the grass was not to live by the outward alone, but by the sustaining energy and secret omnipotence of God.

Now, if Eden in perfection needed to be watered, much more do we. We are plants of the Lord's right-hand planting, but like roots in a dry ground, we need the river of God, which is full of water, to flow hard by our roots and that the dew which fed upon the mountains of Hermon should moisten us every hour, lest like dewless Gilboa, we should be bleak and barren, without any lush greenery to make glad the heart of God or man.

As spiritual life depends upon God to give it, so upon God to sustain it. Only He who makes us Christians can keep us so and hence the need of divine food. We need this divine food not only to keep us barely alive, but *to make us grow*, and as Peter says, "As new-born babes," and we need to grow. Now, how shall we grow without food? Supposing it possible to retain life, do we wish always to be babes? Would we always be little children? Nay, let us pray that we may become young men in Christ and grow up to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus.

But how shall this be, unless the Word of God becomes our spiritual food—unless in hearing it we see Christ and eat His flesh and drink His blood? You do not expect your children to grow without feeding them and you must not expect to grow yourself. Besides, this food is necessary *to strengthen us* when we have grown up. A full grown man, though he is a perfect *man*, may still be very imperfect in many matters. He is perfectly a man, but he is still weak.

How can we wonder that a man is weak if he does not eat? It is no wonder if Christians find themselves weak in prayer, weak in suffering, weak in action, weak in faith, and weak in love, if they neglect to feed upon the Word of God. O souls! there are many among you who are sick and some that are ready to die, because you have shut your mouths against the bread of heaven and have gone day by day without sitting down at the banqueting table and feeding upon the marrow and fatness of the promise.

Moreover, we also need to have spiritual food for our joy as well as for our strength. How often do you see a man sad and troubled, who, if he had sufficient sustenance, would soon have sparkling eyes and a shining face? Many Christians, I do not doubt, are very low and miserable because they do not feed upon the Word. If they ate the roll as Ezekiel did, they would soon find it like honey for its sweetness. If we did but lean more upon the breast of Christ and eat more often from His table and drink from His cup, our peace would flow like a river and our righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Are you starving your souls? If so, there is no wonder that your joys are dead and hang their heads like wilted and withered things. I trust, my dear hearers, many of us know what it is to feed to the full upon the Word of God. And do you not bear me witness that it is *rich* food? There is nothing in the whole world that can so content the spirit as the Word of God. We have read many books, we have listened to the maxims of philosophers, we have gathered up the lessons of experience, but put them altogether, they are not equal to one text of Scripture.

It is said of one Christian, who had spent a great part of his life in translating Livy, that when he came to die, he wished he had spent that time in reading the Word of God. Those who translate the Bible into foreign tongues always say it is a great blessing to them, for instead of growing tired through having to stop long over one word to find out its meaning, they find the word more sweet than before. There is rich food, both in the printed Word and in the spoken Word.

Then again, what *plain* food it is! There is nothing like plain food. But some people come in to listen to the Gospel minister and they say, "Ah, it is not intellectual enough for me!" Such infants would like to live on sponge-cakes, or filthy gingerbread, but we think the plainer the food, the better. We had rather have it just as it is, without any flavoring or seasoning, just as we find it here.

But while it is plain food, yet to those who know it, it is very *sweet* food, for though some say, "It is light bread," as they did in the wilderness, you never loathe this bread. It never palls upon your taste, you are satisfied and you are even satiated with fatness, but you are never disgusted through having too much of it. You feel that you would like to swim in a river of such wine as this. You would like to be shut up in a granary of this heavenly corn. You would be but too glad to have nothing else to think upon but Jesus and Him crucified. No other book to read but that Word, no other light to read it by, but the light of the Spirit, and I think I may add, you would wish to live in no other house but in God's house, for your desire is, "Lord, evermore give us this bread."

The Word of God then is rich food, but it is plain food and let us add, it is *wholesome* food. The man who feeds on God's Word will not be puffed up with pride, or sloth, or lust. You may feed on the best of men's books and soon grow warped in your judgment, but feed on the pure Word of God and you will surely find nothing that is common or unclean in it, but everything that shall make you grow up to be strong men in Christ Jesus.

And then once more, this food of the Word of God is *abundant* food. Millions live upon it and there is enough for millions more. We have great appetites sometimes and we want great promises. Oh! and there are great promises for us—

***"What more can He say than to you He has said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?"***

Our great trials make very great draws upon the treasury, but the treasury never will be emptied for all that. We are great spenders, but bless the Lord, we have great incomes. The great income of the promise is far more than the outgoing of our trials or our afflictions can ever need. There is abundant bread and oh! it is bread that we love. We want no change in it. You have been feeding on it, some of you, these forty years and I might turn to some, who have lived on it for sixty years, yet you do not want any new-fangled doctrines, you want none of the neology of the times, you want the old Word as much as you ever did.

And I can say, though I am but a young believer in Christ, that that same Gospel note which some twelve years ago made glad these ears, is just as glorious a note as it was then. And I feel as I grow older, a closer attachment to the doctrines of grace, a more complete satisfaction with the written Word and a more intense delight in telling it forth to the ears of the people.

3. And now, lastly, *a great privilege involving a consequent duty*. We have been made to eat manna, as angels' food which *we did not know*. It was far above our carnal judgments, yet they who feared the Lord said it was like wafers made with honey. Israel found it to be very sweet and indeed, it is said by the Rabbis, that the manna had such a peculiarity about it, that it was always the flavor that a man wished it to be.

And I think it is very much so with Gospel preaching—if a man chooses it to be disagreeable to him, it will be, but if he desires it to be sweet to him, it will be. He will be sure to be fed if he wants to be fed. For so is it with the precious Book, very much of its flavor is in our own mouths and when our mouths are out of taste, we think the Bible has lost its savor. But it has not. It is our mouths which are to blame, not the Word of God. It is often your ears that are to blame, not the preacher, do not be so quick to blame him, but be a little more rapid in examining yourself.

“Neither did our fathers know.” By nature, however much we may respect them, they are no better than ourselves and they knew nothing about this subtle, mysteriously generous way by which God supplies the needs of the souls of His people. Well now, if God has given us such food as this, brothers and sisters, I think the least thing we can do is to go and gather it, for when the manna fell, you know, it did not fall into their tents, much less into their mouths. But it fell round about the camp, so that every man had to get his basket and go forth and gather it. He that gathered much had nothing over, he that gathered little had no lack, but they all had to gather it and mark, they had to gather it every day.

They were not, having gathered once, to say, “Now I have all I want,” for it bred worms and stank if they kept it. They must gather it fresh and fresh. Now this is what we ought to do with God's Word. We ought to read it and having read it once, we must recollect that what we have read will breed worms unless we go and read again. It is not what we gathered yesterday that will serve for today, we must gather it today.

So we must open our Bibles every morning with this prayer, “Give me this day my daily bread.” We must get some choice text to fill our basket—if we read a chapter we shall have nothing over, if we read a verse we shall have no lack. Then we put the Word in our memories and we shall surely find, perhaps not the first hour, but some other hour in the day, that it will taste like wafers made with honey to us.

It is astonishing how much a man may know of the Bible by learning a text a day and how much he may know experientially by watching the events of the day and interpreting them in the light of the text. If you cannot retain by memory a whole passage, never mind that, take a short text and let it be under your tongue all day and be looking out for a commentary upon it. I do not mean Matthew Henry, or Scott, or Gill—I mean your own daily experience. Be looking out to see how the Lord translates that text to you by His own providence and you will frequently see a striking relation between the text that was given you in the morning and the trials or the mercies that are given you during the day.

At any rate, let the Word of God be the man of your right hand. Don't you think we are so busy reading magazines, newspapers, and new books, and so forth, that we forget this—this new Book, this that is always new and always old, always having a freshness in it. Like a well, it is always springing up, not with musty, stale water, but with fresh water that has never sparkled in the sun before and in all its virgin luster of purity, scatters jewels on the right hand and on the left. Let us go to this fountain and drink fresh and fresh.

You will not find the Word of God dropped into your mouth, you must go and gather it outside the tents. Sometimes the Lord will apply a promise without your having read it yourselves, but this is not generally the case. You must dig in this field where hidden lies the pearl of unknown price and digging there, you shall discover it to your heart's delight.

And then let us mind also that we be much in the hearing of the Word as well as in the reading of it. Let us, when we come up to the house of God, come there to be fed. Oh! there are many who think that it is mere form to spend a Sunday in God's house. I do not know but what these are the worst of Sabbath-breakers after all, for what do they do? They say the table of the Lord is contemptible and His house is despicable and they snuff at it, and say, "What a weariness it is, what dry dull days Sundays are!"

It is not so with the child of God. He comes up to the house of God with this prayer on his heart and on his tongue, "Lord, give Your servant food for my soul today." Our hearers, when they are in a right state, are like birds in the nest—when the mother bird comes with the worm, they are all stretching their necks to see which shall get the food, for they are all hungry and want it. And so should hearers be ready to get hold of the Word, not needing that we should force it down their throats, but waiting there, opening their mouths wide that they may be filled—receiving the Word in the love of it, taking in the Word as the thirsty earth drinks in the rain of heaven.

Hungry souls love the Word. Perhaps the speaker may not always put it as they may like to hear it, but as long as it is God's Word, it is enough for them. They are like persons who are sitting at the reading of a will, the lawyer has a squeaking voice, perhaps, or he mispronounces the words, but what of that?—they are listening to see what is left to them.

So is it with God's people. It is not the preacher, but the preacher's God that these hungry ones look to. Why, if when you were very poor, some benevolent neighbor should send you a loaf of bread by a man who had a club foot, you would not look at the foot, you would look at the bread. And so is it with the hearers of the Word. They know if they wait until they get a perfect preacher, they will get no preacher at all. But they are willing to take the man, imperfections and all, provided he brings the Master's bread. And though he be but a lad and can bring but a few barley loaves and fishes, yet since the Master multiplies the provision, there is enough for all and they feed to the full.

But now, I am speaking to some who never feel this hunger. Ah! poor souls, you are all flesh and you have a fleshly hunger, and that satisfied, it is enough. Well, remember that it is only spirit that can see the kingdom of God, and as there is no spirit in you, where God is you can never come. If there were that new principle in you—the new nature, the spirit—you would have a spiritual hunger, but the natural man discerns not the things that be of God, and while you are thus merely what you were born, a natural man, without the spirit, you will never hunger after spiritual things, for the flesh shall be satisfied and that will be enough for you.

But in the next world, your hunger will come and your thirst too. Scarcely need I remind you of the text, "In hell he lifted up his eyes being in torment and he said, Father Abraham, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue." Better to thirst now than thirst forever. Better to hunger now than to hunger where bread will be denied.

Do you feel your need of Christ this morning? Do you confess your sin? Remember, the gate of heaven's granary is never locked, it is always open, and if there be a soul here that desires to be saved, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." To believe on Him is to let Him be for you what you never can be for yourselves, that is—an atonement for your sin by His blood—a righteousness for your covering by His good works. Believe in Him, give yourself up to Him—trust Him—be saved according to His way and His will. And if the Lord has made you willing to be nothing, that Christ may be everything, you are saved! For he that brings a man into such a state as that, has brought him into salvation.

Trust in Jesus, poor hungry sinner and faith shall feed you to the full! Empty though you be, open the mouth of prayer and stretch out the hands of faith, and He will give you water out of the brook, yea, out of the flinty rock and with bread from heaven shall He sustain you!

The Lord grant that we may be among those of whom Christ said, "Bl

essed are they who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.