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"GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD"

– MATT. 6:11; JOHN 6:5-14. – JUNE 17. –

JESUS and the apostles, entering a boat, sailed across the northerly end of Lake Galilee. The boat was in full view of the shore for probably all of this distance, and the multitudes, not only of those who had heard Jesus, but other multitudes on their way to Jerusalem to attend the Feast of the Passover, going by slow journey afoot, saw the boat and judged of its objective point, and many, desirous of seeing the great Prophet Jesus, of whom they had heard many things, deviated their course toward the point of the boat's landing. And so it was that after Jesus and the disciples had reached their destination (and he had been for some time instructing them in things pertaining to the Kingdom) looking up they beheld a vast concourse of people approaching the spot.

Jesus of course knew that with the vast majority at least the object in coming was merely curiosity, not faith nor desire for instruction. Nevertheless, as always, his generous heart was full of sympathy. He beheld them as sheep having no shepherd, as following Moses and the Doctors of the Law in a blind, almost irrational manner, and having comparatively little capacity or hearing for the good tidings which he had to give. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the fact that they were not in a condition to receive spiritual truths such as he could give to his disciples, he proposed to give them a general object lesson which might do them good physically at the time, and which might be a channel for blessing in the future, as they would look back and remember the event. He proposed to feed the multitude with natural food, and to do it in such a manner as would impress them favorably, and besides, teach a great lesson of faith and trust to his apostles, who would need in future times the faith and confidence inspired by the miracle which he intended to work.

Philip, one of the apostles, resided in a city not far from where they were; hence it was with special appropriateness that our Lord addressed to him the question of supplies – where sufficiency of bread could be obtained, etc.; not, as the Apostle explains, that Jesus was in any question on this subject, but that he wished to stimulate the thought of Philip and the other apostles, and thus to prove or test them, and develop their faith in him. Philip, however, took the question in a purely practical form, and replied that it would require two hundred pennyworth (\$34) of bread to satisfy even partially so large a company. But Andrew, apparently thinking of our Lord's power, but scarcely able to realize so great a miracle, suggested that there was a beginning of the supply at least, in the five barley loaves and two small fishes possessed by one of the company.

Combining the testimonies of the different Evangelists we might suppose the dialogue between Jesus and the disciples to have been about as follows:

Jesus. – "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"

Philip. – "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that everyone may take a little."

All the apostles. – "Send the multitude away that [R2643 : page 172] they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals." (*Luke.*) *Jesus.* – "Give *ye* them to eat." (*Luke.*)

All the apostles. – "Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread and give them to eat?" (*Mark.*)

Jesus. – "How many loaves have ye? Go and see." (*Mark.*)

Andrew. – "There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?"

Thus did our Lord prepare the minds of his disciples to appreciate the miracle he was about to perform, and then instructed them to seat

the people for the proposed meal. This was a comparatively easy task, because it was a grassy country, we are told, and the people were accustomed to a certain method of arranging themselves in groups of fifties and hundreds for general feasts.

The fact that our Lord Jesus gave thanks for the bread and fish should be an important lesson to all who seek in any degree to be his followers. If it was appropriate that he should render thanks to the heavenly Father for some plain barley bread (the poorest and cheapest sort), and for some dried fish, how appropriate it is that we who by nature are sinners and under condemnation, and only permitted to call God our Father through the reconciliation that is in Christ Jesus – how appropriate that we should lift our hearts and voices in thankfulness to the heavenly Father as the author of every good blessing and gift which we enjoy!

We cannot understand how any Christian dare neglect to render thanks for his daily food, and we thoroughly believe that those who do neglect this propriety are great losers thereby. God, of course, loses nothing, for giving does not impoverish him, neither would withholding make him rich; but the Christian who has learned in everything to give thanks, and to make acknowledgment to the heavenly Father, has learned to appreciate and to enjoy his blessing more than others. **[R2644 : page 172]** To such thankful hearts the plainest of food will be more appreciated, more happifying, more satisfying than to others. And it is undoubtedly a fact that a peaceful, thankful, happy mind is not only a blessing of itself, but additionally an aid to digestion and to the obtaining of good benefits from the food which we eat. How many dyspeptics know that it is possible to eat without satisfying, and to have plenty, and yet be unable to derive therefrom comfort and proper nourishment! And perhaps there is no better antidote to dyspepsia than a thankful, grateful heart, which acknowledges divine blessings and seeks to use them, not only with thankfulness, but with contentment, and thus has great gain.

True, God does not resent failures to acknowledge him in all our ways, but continues to cause the sun to shine upon the evil and upon the good, and to send the rain alike upon the just and the unjust, and to permit many of the blessings of this present life to continue with those who make no proper acknowledgment of them. Nevertheless, such cannot hope to grow in divine favor, as they might if in all their ways they acknowledged God and sought to see in all the affairs of life his providential care.

These remarks, however, apply not to the world in general, nor to mere nominal believers, but only to those who have become the Lord's people by entering into a covenant with him through Christ. As for the world in general, who are not seeking to be the Lord's people and to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, it would seem that their offering of thanks, or prayers of any kind, would be inappropriate, as we read: "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes; or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing that thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind thee." (Psalm 50:16,17.) In a word, then, there is just one right way to begin to be the Lord's followers, and those who do not wish to begin according to the Lord's direction, in self-consecration, have no right to suppose that outward acts of formalistic piety are acceptable or pleasing to God. We must first become the Lord's before we can hope that any worship or service from us will be acceptable to him through Jesus.

The faith of the apostles is well demonstrated in the fact that they proceeded to seat the people, according to the Lord's instructions, and then proceeded to divide to them the, at first, very limited quantity of food. Without faith in the Lord they would undoubtedly have refused to take any part in the proceedings, fearing that it would bring reproach and ridicule upon themselves. The lesson which they learned in this connection no doubt went with them through subsequent years, teaching them that they could do all things by the power of Christ, if laboring under his command. And the same lesson comes forcefully to us all. Neither our duties nor our privileges are wholly measured by our own

abilities. A proper faith in the Lord permits us to realize his omnipotent power, and that if he be with us, for instance in the distribution of spiritual food to the hungry, the little of means and ability and opportunity at our disposal may be so blessed as to accomplish marvelous things. Indeed, have we not this very experience to-day in connection with the spread of the harvest message? Out of the little of means and talent, opportunity and ability, what God hath wrought! How many have been fed and are being fed!

The miracle was all the Lord's, and yet a great blessing came to the apostles, in that they were privileged [R2644 : page 173] to be co-workers with the Lord. And similarly here, in the dissemination of the harvest message, we recognize that it is all of our Lord, the present Bridegroom, King, Reaper, and yet that he is pleased to use as disseminators of the truth all those who have faith in him and who gladly accept his service. As our Lord could have performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand without the instrumentality of his disciples, so now he could feed the hungry Israelites indeed – who are famished, not for bread and not for water, but for the hearing of the Word of the Lord (Amos 8:11) – without our aid. Let us gratefully thank him for the privilege of being co-workers in any capacity, and let us the more zealously do with our might whatsoever our hands find to do.

Another great lesson taught by this miracle was that of economy; for the apostles who distributed the food were required to gather up for their own future use the suitable fragments which remained, and each one accordingly filled his basket or haversack, which they were accustomed to carry in their journeys. The miracle would have had only half its weight without this closing lesson of economy. The disciples and the multitude might have learned to think of God's powers in an improper light, and to have expected such provision as would compensate for their carelessness and prodigality. But the gathering of the fragments showed, first of all, the immensity of the miracle, and secondly, it taught the lesson that we are to use the means which God has put into our hands, and not to expect unnecessary miracles.

How many of the Lord's dear people need to learn this lesson of economy! How many are wasteful of the daily food which the Lord provides! How many would be the more blessed by learning to practice careful economy, not only that they might have in the future, but also that they might in emergency supply to others spiritual or natural food as opportunity afforded! Let all who are disposed to be extravagant and wasteful well consider this lesson from the great Teacher, that nothing is to be wasted, that we have a responsibility in respect to all that God has provided for us, either directly or indirectly, and that after asking divine blessing upon our affairs, and thus signifying our appreciation of them, we are to seek to wisely use them, as we think would be pleasing in his sight, and frugally, economically.

The same lesson might be applied also to our spiritual food. The fact that the Lord has given us bountifully "things new and old" does not mean that we are to treat those blessed truths carelessly, when we have eaten thereof and found satisfaction to our souls; rather, we are to be careful of all the fragments, and are to gather and preserve them for further and future use, esteeming them none the less the Lord's provision than when first we received them from his hands.
