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"I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE."

– JOHN 6:22-40. – JULY 8. –

SOME OF THE MULTITUDE who dined on the five loaves and two fish were evidently very deeply impressed with the miracle, and inspired with great respect for Jesus. A number of them (we cannot suppose very many) concluded that they would follow this great Teacher, possessed of such wonderful powers, feeling assured that becoming his disciples would at least safeguard them from want; and this, to a people of their kind and under those conditions, was evidently quite an inducement. However, when they found the Lord on the other side the lake, at Capernaum, and expressed to him their interest, and how it had led them to follow him, he told them plainly that theirs was a selfish or mercenary interest, and not the kind that he desired to cultivate, namely, an interest in the truth.

Taking advantage of the situation, our Lord gave, not only to these but also to his disciples and to us through them, a most valuable lesson on the proper [R2651 : page 187] things to be sought after; pointing out that the chief aim and desire and object of life should not be the meat that perisheth, earthly food, earthly comforts, earthly pleasures, which at very most can be but transitory, but that on the contrary the chief aim of all should be to attain life eternal, beyond the present dying condition. He points out that God's provision for his creatures is not merely earthly food for the sustenance of our natural bodies for a little time, but much more important, a spiritual nourishment, of which, if we partake, we shall attain eternal life.

He would have them see that the miracle which he had performed, and whose blessing they had shared, was merely an illustration of a greater gift, of a more valuable bread of life, that he, the Son of God, was alone able to give them – and the same is true of us and of all. By way of assuring them that he was as able to provide the bread of eternal

life as he had shown himself able to provide the natural food, he declared himself to be the Son of God; and that the heavenly Father had sealed him, marked him, granted him the evidences and proofs of sonship in the powers conferred upon him. The seal was the holy spirit, the holy power of God, which acting upon our Lord Jesus enabled him to turn the water into wine and to increase the broken barley loaves and two little fish so as to feed the multitude. These powers were the evidences or outward manifestations to men that God's holy spirit was with him, the mark or seal of his relationship to God as an honored representative, a Son. On the strength of these evidences, the witnesses having the right condition of heart should have been prepared to heed our Lord's testimony, as a message from the Father.

The discourse was not without its effect: the hearers felt the force of the suggestion that the important food to be sought after was that which would give the life eternal, and as Jews they had before their minds the further thought that God had made a covenant of works with their nation, with promises of eternal life attached thereto – the Mosaic Law Covenant. Hence their inquiry, What works shall we do that would be pleasing to God, and that thereby we might have eternal life? Give us whatever message you have that will help us in this matter.

Our Lord's answer may at first seem to us a peculiar one, in that he declares that to believe on him would be a "*work*" – the work most acceptable before God – the only work that could possibly make them acceptable to God. What is meant by this we will consider further along. His hearers evidently understood exactly what he meant, *viz.*, that the thing most pleasing in God's sight would be that they should acknowledge him as the Son of God, the Messiah, coming into the world according to divine promise, to establish the Kingdom of God, and to begin the blessing of all the families of the earth. But now they asked a *sign* of his Messiahship, instead of realizing that they had already seen the sign or signet or seal of God upon the Lord Jesus, as manifested not only in his spirit of love, kindness, generosity, goodness, purity and truth, as well as in his doctrines, but additionally

that they had seen outward manifestations and evidences of the divine power upon him, as shown, for instance, in the miracle of the day before. This was because they were hard-hearted, as the Scriptures elsewhere express the matter (Mark 3:5; John 12:40), that is to say, they were in a faithless attitude, not readily impressionable, but rather inclined to be skeptical: hence these signs or evidences of the seal of God upon Jesus were not sufficient for them.

We can readily see, however, that if sign upon sign had been given, the same "evil heart of unbelief" could reject ten signs as well as it could reject one. Just so it was in the case of Pharaoh: he was really more impressed with the first sign given by Moses than by the succeeding ones, each of which being received in an improper spirit tended to make his heart the harder, until the last. Just so it is with some today in respect to the Lord's promises. They incline to ask, Did the Apostle say this, that is contrary to my prejudices? And if convinced of the fact they would want to know whether any other apostle had said it, and thirdly, whether the Lord himself had said it, and fourthly, whether any of the prophets had said it, – seeking not so much to believe as for an *excuse* for disbelieving. Such persons usually, if they had all of these evidences, would be no more convinced by the multiplicity of testimony. On the contrary, he who really believes the Bible to be God's Word believes its every authentic testimony, whether by the Lord or an apostle or prophet, and whether stated once or many times reiterated.

The workings of skepticism in the minds of our Lord's auditors is evidenced by their statement. In substance they said, "We cannot acknowledge that your miracle was so great or so wonderful as necessarily to imply that you are the Son of God, for we remember that Moses exercised a power something of this kind; in fact, he provided bread enough for our forefathers, the whole nation of Israel, for quite a long time in the wilderness, and that without any loaves and fish to begin with, – we refer to the manna."

Our Lord's response is that the manna was not produced by Moses, that he had nothing whatever to do with sending it; that it came directly as a provision of the heavenly Father, Moses not being even an agent in the matter. And then our Lord pointed out that the manna given in the wilderness was typical of the true Manna, the true bread of eternal life – himself and the truth he [R2651 : page 188] proclaimed – which he now desired them to receive at his hands.

They did not yet get the thought that he referred to himself, but rather were getting a crude and natural thought, that as God had given manna from heaven that sustained their fathers in the wilderness, so now this great Teacher, Jesus, was telling them of a still higher class of manna, the partaking of which would yield eternal life, and hence they exclaimed, "Lord, evermore give us this bread!" Our Lord then explained the figure or parable, declaring, in the language of our Golden Text, "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

It is evident that in the words "cometh to me" our Lord did not mean to approach him as his hearers had done, coming across the lake. The expression "cometh to me" must be understood, therefore, as coming to the Lord with hunger and thirst for righteousness, with a desire for the life eternal, and hence for the bread of life by which it might be attained. All who would thus come to Jesus, in this proper attitude of heart, would find him to be indeed a satisfying portion. Likewise the expression, "He that believeth on me shall never thirst," must be understood to mean more than merely believing that such a person lived, for it is written that "devils also believe and tremble:" to "believe," therefore, must be understood to signify accepting the Lord, not merely intellectually, but with the heart, as it is written, "With the heart man *believeth unto righteousness*" [to a change of heart which aspires to righteousness]. He who thus believes in the Lord from the heart, recognizing him as the Son of God, through whom are to be fulfilled all the exceeding great and precious promises of the divine Word, receives such a refreshment, such a slaking of thirst, such a

satisfaction, as will never end so long as he maintains this faith. (Rom. 10:10.) Such find the divine provision in Christ so abundant that they could not ask for more, and exclaim, – "It satisfies my longings, as nothing else could do."

And now we see the meaning of our Lord's words of verse 29, "This is the *work* of God [the work which God would be pleased with], that we *believe* on him whom he hath sent." There is a *work* connected with believing; – not a work with our hands, but a work with our heads and our hearts: and no work that we could do with our hands would be as acceptable in the Lord's sight as this. Indeed, when we realize that in our fallen and imperfect condition it is impossible for us to do anything perfectly, when we remember also that God is perfect, that all his work is perfect, and that he cannot therefore be in sympathy with imperfection, or any degree of sin, we can readily see that the very best works we could offer him aside from *faith* would be unacceptable.

But God has proposed to do a great work for us – he has done that great work in that he has provided the Redeemer, through whom the ransom-price has been paid for our race: and now God can be just and yet be the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Hence, while no work that we can do could be accepted of the Lord so long as we are under condemnation, yet he can, by his own provision, accept our *faith* in Christ, [**R2652 : page 188**] and justify us through that faith: this, our first work possible, is therefore what God calls for. He will accept no other work, except it is preceded by this one and based upon this one. O that all could realize the importance of faith in the Lord's sight! "Without faith it is impossible to please God," and the more faith we exercise the more do we please him: not credulity, not a belief of something which God has not said; not a belief in our own imaginings or those of other men; but a belief in what God has said, and a firm, confident trust therein: this is acceptable with God, and becomes to all who exercise it the ground or base of justification, that "*being justified by faith* we might have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." – Rom. 5:1.

The Lord did not here discuss the further step to the high calling of this Gospel age; hence we will not discuss it now. He is dealing merely with our first necessary step in approaching God, – justification. The thing necessary, in order to justification, is the acceptance of Christ as the Bread of Life – which must be preceded by the realization that we have no life in ourselves, death having passed upon all of our race through father Adam's transgression; and that the Lord Jesus was made flesh in order that he might meet the penalty that was upon father Adam, and thus upon the race; and that *now*, therefore, whoever accepts this free grace of God in Christ, whoever appropriates to himself the merit of Christ's sacrifice, is thereby eating, partaking of the great benefits and blessings provided by God in the Anointed one, who gave his life for the life of the world, a ransom price. Whoever mentally accepts this fact, and feeds upon it in his heart, is represented as feeding upon the flesh of the Son of Man – partaking of the human rights, privileges and blessings of restitution [or in this age justification] provided in him.

Our Lord pointed out to his hearers the fact that their slowness to receive him, and the slowness of the people of Israel in general, was not an evidence that he was not the Messiah, but rather was an evidence that they were not in a condition to receive the Messiah. And further, that it was not God's purpose that he should attract the whole Jewish people, but merely that he should draw to himself, by the gracious words which should proceed out of his mouth, and by the miracles [R2652 : page 189] or evidences of power of the Lord in him, such as the Father had "given" him – such as were pleasing to the Father, such as were ready to receive a further blessing through this channel which the Father had provided. And he assured them that while not expecting all to be thus drawn to him, nevertheless all who would be drawn thus of the Father he would most gladly welcome, because he was not in the world on a mission of his own merely, but to fulfil the Father's purposes, – with which he was in full harmony.

In the two verses following, our Lord seems to distinguish between the two classes of saved ones, verse 39 referring to the elect class of this Gospel age, and verse 40 to the general blessing upon mankind to follow this age, during the Millennium, – and to the opportunity that will then be afforded to every creature to be blessed with this great gift of eternal life, purchased by our Lord at such high cost as his own life.

The elect are frequently, as here, spoken of as specially *given* to Jesus, while the whole of mankind are referred to as his because *bought* with his own precious blood. The Father draws to the Son during this age a special class, and gives such a class to him to be companions, joint-heirs in his Millennial Kingdom – these are sometimes called his "brethren," as when it is said that Jesus was "the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29); and again, they are designated his bride and joint-heir, in contradistinction to the saved of the world of mankind, who will be recognized as the children of Christ, and of whom he will be the "Everlasting Father." – Rev. 21:9; 22:17; Rom. 8:17; Isa. 9:6.

Our Lord declares it to be the Father's will that all whom he has "given" him shall be saved, shall be raised up – not one of this class shall be lost. Who, then, are these thus sure of salvation? We answer that the Apostle Paul adds a word of explanation along this line, informing us of the class whom the Father has elected and predestinated: they are such as receive the Lord Jesus now by faith, and who hearing the invitation of this Gospel age, the "high calling," are so impressed with it that they lay aside every weight and run with patience the race set before them in the gospel; – and so doing, under divine providence and direction they are molded and fashioned as respects their characters so that they become "copies of God's dear Son." – Rom. 8:29. – *Diaglott.*

The heavenly Father fixed the marks and conditions of his predestination of this class, not so much in respect to all who

shall *hear* the good tidings (altho he has to do with sending the message); not so much in respect to who all shall be *drawn* by the message of his grace in Christ (tho he has to do with the drawing, and in the present time is drawing only a particular class); not so much with reference to the *call* that goes forth to all who accept Jesus, inviting them to run the race of self-sacrifice in his footsteps (tho he is interested in this call, and supervises the affairs of those who accept this call, causing that all things shall work together for their good); but especially he has predestinated in respect to the *number* who shall constitute the Bride of Christ, and to the *character* of all who shall be in that company: that it shall be composed of such and such only as shall during this Gospel age, while in the school of Christ, learn thoroughly the lessons of faith and obedience, developing characters of like pattern to that so gloriously manifested in Jesus, whom the Father sent forth to be not only our Redeemer, but also our Pattern.

It is the Father's will that every one who thus obeys the leadings of divine providence, and attains to the likeness of the Lord Jesus in his heart, his will, his intention (not perfection of the *flesh*), shall everyone of them be saved in this great salvation, and be sharers with Jesus in the "first resurrection," and in the glory, honor and immortality to which it leads. Not one of these shall be lost; every one of them shall be raised up to that glorious station at the appointed time – "the last day," the seventh of the great week of thousand-year days, – the Millennial day. And as the Prophet declares, it will be early in that day, for "God shall help her [Zion] and that right early [in the morning]."

The 40th verse does not refer to those whom the Father specially gives to the Son to be companions and joint-heirs in the Kingdom, and whom he draws through his providences during this age: it refers to the remainder of mankind whose ransom price our Lord Jesus has paid, and who, according to the Father's program, our Lord Jesus himself is to draw unto himself, during the Millennial age; as it is written, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." But even as the Father's drawing is not a compulsory drawing, so likewise the drawing of the

Son will not be compulsory. But since we may assume that the majority of those who now resist the Father's drawing do so because of blindness, ignorance, etc., because the prince of this world is now reigning and deceiving, we may reasonably suppose that when our dear Redeemer's Millennial Kingdom shall have been established, and when Satan, the prince of this world, has been "bound" (Rev. 20:2), and when the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth, – then the drawing influence upon the world of mankind exerted by the Redeemer himself and by the Church, his body, associated with him in glory, will be a drawing which will yield much larger results, so that many will yield to it and come to the Lord truly and heartily, and receive of the blessings which God has provided in him; – all except those who wilfully love sin and refuse the terms of the Kingdom, faith and obedience.

Of this class our Lord declares (verse 40), that it is **[R2652 : page 190]** his Father's will that all such shall see the Son (their blinded eyes being opened in that Millennial day, as the Lord has promised through the prophets. – Zech. 12:10.) Their eyes of understanding being then opened, they will be able to appreciate, as they cannot now appreciate, the Lord and the covenant of eternal life which he offers to all who obey him. They will not thus see him, however, until the god of this world, who now blinds the eyes of their understanding, shall be bound for the thousand years, and his baneful influence offset with the light of the knowledge of God which will then shine out to the world from the great Sun of Righteousness, – the Lord and the glorified Church, his body.

It is God's will that all who shall accept Christ then shall have everlasting life too; and that they shall be raised up by the Lord Jesus to perfection also, – tho theirs will be an earthly, and not like the others a heavenly, perfection; and their raising up will also be "at the last day," but not at its beginning as with the "elect" of the "first resurrection." The overcomers of this Gospel age, the body of Christ, will be perfected in his likeness in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and

then subsequently, throughout that age, the work of raising up the world of mankind out of sin and depravity and degradation will go gradually and grandly forward, until by the close of the Millennial age all the willing and obedient shall have eaten to their fill of the bread from heaven and shall be fully raised up, out of sin and death, to life eternal – in the image and likeness of God as was Adam before sin, but with characters perfected and tested in righteousness by their Millennial experiences.
