

[R3332 : page 76]

"GIVE YE THEM TO EAT."

– MATT. 14:13-23. – MARCH 20. –

Golden Text: – "Jesus said unto them, I am the Bread of Life."
– John 6:35.

ON hearing of the death of John the Baptist, Jesus crossed the Lake of Galilee, – out of the dominion of Herod. Possibly his thought was that his ministry was not yet concluded, and that Herod, having shown such boldness against John, might seek to interfere with his labors and the completion of his ministry. Or possibly he feared that a rebellious spirit might be aroused amongst the people – and his teachings would seem to foster this. An intimation of the kind is given in the fact that after the miracle the people sought to make Jesus king. To have encouraged any such matter would be to have opposed what he recognized to be the divine arrangement.

Possibly, as some of the epistles seem to intimate, Jesus sought privacy with his apostles that he might contemplate the character of the work he was to do. Evidence of his growing popularity at this time is given in the fact that so large a multitude went afoot for many miles around the shore of the lake that they might be with him and hear his precious words of life – parables, etc., respecting the Kingdom which he proposed to establish, and in which all his apostles and all his faithful were to share.

INSTANT IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON.

When Jesus saw the multitude his heart was filled with compassion, and he could not withhold himself from them. In season and out of season, so far as his convenience was concerned, he must work the works of God, lay down his life inch by inch, hour by hour. We read that "he had compassion on the multitude," for they were as sheep without a shepherd. They had a heart-hunger, although they

knew not what it was really, for they longed for higher, better, nobler conditions than surrounded them, and this great Teacher seemed to have words such as none other had for them – words of hope, of reconciliation with God, of divine providence and care. Those who sat in Moses' seat (scribes and Pharisees, Matt. 23:2) were so filled with a misconception of their proper attitude toward God, misled so, that they merely banded themselves together to enjoy the divine promises and to appropriate them to themselves, and give up the remainder of their nation as publicans and sinners, considering them too lacking in piety to have divine favor or any part or lot in the Kingdom privileges. Jesus, however, passed by these self-righteous ones who rejected him and the only way of approach to God, and showed his special favor to the humbler poor, who heard his message gladly and wondered at the "gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth" – words telling them that God despises not the imperfect and weak if they are sincere and consecrated to him.

It was after three o'clock in the afternoon, in the early evening, that the disciples suggested that it was time for the multitude to be dismissed that they might find food and lodging in the surrounding villages. John and Mark record a dialogue on the subject between Jesus and Philip, the home of the latter being in the adjoining town of Bethsaida, and who was therefore acquainted with the region, its resources, etc. Jesus inquired of Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" Philip replied that it would require two hundred pennyworth of bread to give each of them a little. This would mean about two hundred dollars' worth of bread according to our present day reckoning. All of the apostles then seemed to join in with the suggestion that the multitude be sent away that they might buy their own provisions as well as secure lodging – though as a matter of fact the people of the East make little ado about lodgings. They will camp almost anywhere, and, wrapping their cloaks about them, lie down in the fields or by the roadsides to sleep – in any place not supposed to be dangerous. **[R3333 : page 77]**

SEEKING FIRST A NATURAL SUPPLY.

It was then Jesus said to his disciples, "Give ye them to eat." Mark says that they inquired, "Shall we go and buy them 200 pennyworth of bread and give them to eat?" Jesus asked, "How many loaves have ye? Go and see." It was the Apostle Andrew who returned with the word that a lad of the company had five loaves and two small fishes which he had put at their disposal. Jesus accepted the situation and instructed that the multitude be directed to be seated in companies. It is supposed that they arranged themselves in groups of fifty, and that there were 100 groups, making in all 5,000. Apparently they adopted the form of a three-sided square, after the shape of a Roman reclining table, the disciples who served them passing in at the open side and thus being able to reach the entire company. We are not informed how the five barley loaves and two small fishes were increased so as to be sufficient for the five thousand people with a remainder of twelve baskets full. Quite probably the increase was while being broken in the Lord's hands, though possibly also the increasing continued at the hands of the apostles as they in turn distributed the food to the people.

If such a story were told us respecting an ordinary person we could not believe it. Indeed it would be not faith but credulity on our part to believe it. So it is with those who deny the heavenly origin of our Lord Jesus: they do not believe that he could or did do such works as are recorded in the Scriptures. Neither could we believe the matter from their standpoint. It is because we believe that Jesus was the only begotten of the Father, who came into the world to be our Redeemer – because we believe that the Father poured upon him the divine spirit or power that we can also believe that he had power to still the tempest or thus increase the food by his blessing.

EVERYDAY MIRACLES OVERLOOKED.

But, after all, the greatest skeptics in the world do believe in miracles: they see them all about us, in all the affairs of life. They

well know that the same amount of barley that composed those five loaves, if planted, might have brought forth a harvest sufficient for the five thousand; they also know that the two fishes in the ordinary course of nature in a short time might have brought forth a sufficient supply of fish for the five thousand. It is easy to be seen that he who arranged the provisions of nature had full control of the situation, and could as easily supply the needed food in the way he did as by some other method. Who will deny that it is a miracle from man's standpoint to have the grain grow and the fishes produce their kind? These miracles of nature are going on about us every day, and hence they are common to us and we forget that they are miracles. It is a fact, nevertheless, that while we can analyze the fish and determine exactly its component elements, and could bring these same elements together in a dish and could form them into shapes of fish, we could not give life to the fish or cause them to bring forth of their kind. That to us would be a miracle.

It is also true that we can analyze the barley and determine definitely its component elements and could bring them together in the same proportions and shapes, yet it is beyond our power to cause the products to germinate or to increase. Let these standing miracles that surround us every day convince all those who trust in the omnipotent God that he is able to do all that he is recorded to have done through his Anointed One. And let us remember that these things which Jesus did, as the Apostle declared, "manifested forth his coming glory" – illustrated and exemplified the coming power and glory of the great King of the world, who is to bless and feed and uplift the race of Adam and give life everlasting to as many as will receive it upon his terms.

If we could not accept these Scriptural testimonies respecting the power of Jesus over natural things, neither could we accept the declarations of the prophets and apostles respecting his coming power in the Kingdom. If we can accept the Scriptural declaration respecting him as the great Restorer of all things, God's

representative, Emmanuel, who in the future shall bless the whole world of mankind, then with equal propriety and with the same kind of faith we can recognize him as the one in whom the Father's power operated in a small way in connection with the miracles under consideration and others at the first advent.

CAREFUL USE OF DIVINE BOUNTIES.

The whole lesson was intensified by the Lord's direction that the disciples should gather up the fragments; and, besides, another lesson was given, namely, that however great and bountiful are God's provisions for people, none of them are to be wasted. We cannot see wastefulness in any of the Lord's consecrated people without feeling that, however great progress they have made in understanding the mind of the Lord in some respects, they are still deficient in this particular. An appreciation of the gift and respect for the Giver implies a carefulness and a stewardship in respect to all that comes to us from our heavenly Father – things temporal and things spiritual. According to our Lord's parables he is measuring our love and zeal in a considerable degree by our use or abuse of the talents, opportunities, blessings, temporal and spiritual, now bestowed upon us.

We may be sure that in this miracle as in the others our Lord intended to inculcate some important lesson of faith or practice – not so much for the public as for his special followers, his disciples. We may presume, therefore, that he had a twofold purpose in sending them away by ship while he remained and dismissed the multitude, telling them that his discourses and miracles were at an end. One of these purposes doubtless was private fellowship and communion with the Father in the mountain – apart from the multitude – apart even from his beloved **[R3333 : page 78]** twelve apostles. There are times when we love to join our hearts and voices with others at the throne of heavenly grace, and come as a company of the Lord's people into fellowship and communion with him, and there are other

times when we seem to need individual, personal, private communion with God, as our Lord seemed to have required on this occasion.

Our Lord's second object was, doubtless, to give his disciples opportunity for thinking over the miracle and talking it over by themselves in his absence. They might thus speak more freely one with the other, and get more benefit than if he had been with them, and they would have been under a certain degree of restraint in his presence. The Lord wished this great lesson to be thoroughly impressed upon their minds: it would be helpful to them in future years to remember how he had power to increase their temporal food without human interference and independent of human conditions. It would be a lesson also respecting the spiritual food, that they should not despise the day of small things; that if sent by him to break the bread of life to the people, they should not be fearful and hindered by reason of unpropitious conditions prevailing, but should have full confidence in him that he had the power to overrule in all the affairs of life, that all his gracious purposes might be accomplished.

WE MAY DISPENSE THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN.

There is a lesson for us of the present day, too, in this matter, as there has been a lesson for the Church all the way down throughout this Gospel age. We may feel that the multitude is large and that the means at our disposal for reaching them with the bread of life are limited. We may be inclined to say here, we have such and such things, but "what are they among so many?" Let us hearken to the Lord's Word, "Give ye them to eat." It should be sufficient for us to know that any one is present who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear." Tell him the good tidings, no matter in what form they must be presented, no matter how intolerable the conditions. The important thing is that here are some who are hungry for the Truth, and that if we will the Lord will bless us in ministering it to them.

We have been reminded of this parable sometimes as we made out our annual reports of the work done by the WATCH TOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY – and endeavored to realize the immense amount of spiritual food borne to the people all over the civilized world, and our privileges connected with its dissemination. We have marveled how the Lord blessed the comparatively small amount of money so that it reached so far; – it seemed to multiply under the Lord's blessing. The matter is with us as it was with the apostles. The Lord himself raises the question of how much it will require. We look about us and see how few are hungering and thirsting for the Truth, how many grasping after multitudinous errors, false gospels, new lights, etc., and we hear the Lord's word, "Give ye them to eat." It requires faith to go forth and to hope to accomplish the great harvest work under present limited conditions, but so surely as the Lord is the Chief Reaper, his blessing upon what he has given us to dispense will make it *sufficient*, so that all who are really hungry may be fed.

Let the lesson sink deeply into our hearts; let us have the more confidence in him who not only provided the temporal food centuries ago, but who now according to his promise has come forth a second time and is dispensing again spiritual food, meat in due season, things new and old from the treasury of his Word. Let us be swift to appropriate these promises to our hearts, seeing to it that we are still hungering and thirsting after clearer views of the divine character and plan. Let us be on the alert to give to all who are hungering and thirsting the blessed food which has so greatly refreshed and strengthened us. **[R3334 : page 78]** If they do not get it they will faint by the way as they go looking for other provisions. We have the very thing which all of the household of faith need; without it they cannot maintain their standing, they cannot press on, they shall surely become discouraged. A thousand shall fall at our side and ten thousand at our right hand without this needed nourishment. Let us be alert.

THE USE OF MEANS – THEN AND NOW.

The lad who had the loaves and fishes and who put them at the disposal of the Lord, we may be sure was greatly blessed, although we hear nothing further of him than is here mentioned. It was a case of opportunity, and we may be sure that the boy thus willing to put his all at our Lord's disposal, instead of attempting to sell it to the hungry at famine prices, received a corresponding blessing. The lesson for all is that whatever we may have of financial means for sending forth the bread of life to others, or whatever we may have of knowledge of the Truth, is neither to be selfishly hoarded nor selfishly partaken of by ourselves. It is to be consecrated to the Lord, and out of that consecration the Lord will bring blessing to others and increased blessings upon our own heads and hearts.

The Golden Text of our lesson may be said to be the very heart of it in some respects. It was after Jesus had spent the night in prayer and toward morning came to his disciples still on the lake in the boat – stormstayed – and after they had come to the landing safely, that some of those who had been with him and who had partaken of the miraculous bread and fish had returned to the vicinity of Capernaum and sought Jesus again, that he upbraided them and accused them of seeking him more for the loaves and fishes than on account of the truths which he proclaimed; and using this as a text, proceeded to tell them of himself as the Bread of Eternal Life that had come down from heaven, of which if a man eat he would never die – the bread of life everlasting.

Blessed are our ears for we have heard! blessed are the eyes of our understanding for we have seen him! blessed are we for we have tasted of this Bread of Life! Blessed **[R3334 : page 79]** are we if we are still hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and day after day being more and more filled according to the promise.

A FAMINE FOR THE WORD OF GOD. – AMOS 8:11.

We live in very stirring times, in times when there is a greater hungering for knowledge, for wealth, for influence, for power, for everything, than there ever was before. Everybody seems to be hungry. Yet our day is so full of philosophies, inventions, sciences (true and false), moneymaking schemes, financial schemes, theological schemes, etc., etc., that the whole world is absorbed in attempts to satisfy these various hungerings of the soul. Yet these things do not *satisfy* even the worldly; – they still hunger and thirst; and nothing will ever satisfy them but the living bread – the Truth. Now is the time for us who have become "new creatures in Christ Jesus" to see to it that we dispense to others the true bread and water of life; and that our own earthly hunger for earthly things shall not be prospered or gratified at the expense of our spiritual hunger for spiritual things, but that the latter shall have our special attention and care and provision.

The more people are satisfied with earthly things the less inclination they will have for the heavenly things, and the more we are satisfied with the heavenly things the less of appetite will we have for the earthly things. The new nature flourishes at the expense of the old nature, and the new ambitions, hopes and desires at the expense of the old. Likewise when the old nature flourishes, it is at the expense of the new in all of life's affairs. Let us then, realizing the difference between the food that perisheth and the food that brings divine blessing – eternal life – let us choose the latter, let us feed more and more upon the Lord and upon his Word and thus grow strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and be more and more weaned from the world, its spirit, its hopes, its ambitions. We seek a heavenly country, a heavenly Kingdom, a heavenly nature, and heavenly qualities, fitted and prepared for that heavenly nature. We have found the great Lifegiver, the one who can and does supply this bread from heaven. It is our great privilege to be the dispensers

of this bread – "Give ye them to eat." "He that hath an ear let him hear."

