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"EVER GIVE US THIS BREAD."

JOHN 6:1-14. – FEB. 26.

Golden Text: – "I am the living bread which came down from heaven." – John 6:51.

CONSIDERABLE periods are sometimes covered by the opening expression of this lesson, "After these things." How long after our previous lesson depends on which feast is referred to. If it was Purim, only a month had elapsed; if it was Passover, a year. As previously pointed out, John's Gospel, written after the others, was evidently designed not so much to give a history of our Lord's life as to mention incidents omitted in the other Gospels. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, which is the basis of this lesson, stands prominently before us as the only miracle that is particularly described in all four of the [R3502 : page 44] Gospels. John's account of it brings to our attention some features not so clearly presented in the others.

From other accounts we learn that our Lord's crossing of the Sea of Galilee at this time was for needed rest. His preaching and teaching and traveling were practically continuous; his hearers, going and coming from morning until night left him little opportunity for privacy and rest, and he was quite willing thus to lay down his life in feeding the sheep – not only exhausting his vitality through the healing of the diseases of the people, but also through the exhortations and public speaking, which are particularly enervating in the open air and when prolonged.

Another reason for leaving Galilee was that his disciples, whom he had sent forth two by two through the various cities to teach and to heal as he was doing, had now returned to him, and doubtless he desired rest for them also, and a measure of quiet and privacy in which he could hear from them reports and give them needed instructions

respecting their work. The third reason was that at this time the news had just reached Galilee that Herod had caused the beheading of John the [R3503 : page 44] Baptist, and the further news that the army of Herod had been vanquished by that of Aretas. The news had unquestionably stirred the people and aroused their imaginations respecting the future, and to some extent had unfitted them for the hearing of the Lord's message. Some had even said to our Lord and the Apostles, "Depart from Herod's dominions, lest he slay thee as he has slain John the Baptizer." Still another reason probably was to give occasion for this miracle.

Perhaps all of these reasons combined to make the change a desirable one and several of the apostles being fishermen, whose boats were at their own disposal, and the Sea of Galilee small, the undertaking was not extraordinary. The sail across the sea brought Jesus and the apostles to a quiet secluded place, where they probably spent a day or two in rest and comparative privacy, communing respecting the interests of the work. To camp out of doors thus, without tents, etc., seems to have been not an unusual thing in that climate at that time; indeed even to-day one may find the Arabs in that country sleeping along the roadside at night, wrapped in their outer cloaks or garments and, like Jacob, with a stone for their pillow.

SEEKING THE MESSIAH.

Another account tells us that when the multitudes who had been listening to the teachings of Jesus, seeing his miracles, etc., learned that he had gone to the other side of the lake, some of them went afoot and some in small boats in the general direction in which he had gone, seeking him. At this particular season many had their arrangements so made that they were on a holiday journey, going up to Jerusalem to the feast. On such occasions there was an unusual concourse on all roads leading to Jerusalem, and the people – excited by the conduct of Herod and bewildered and wondering respecting the Messiah – turned aside from their journey to hear more from the lips of this great

Prophet, Jesus, and to see for themselves whether or not they thought he possessed the qualifications that would fit him for the Messiahship, for the deliverance of their nation, for the establishment of the long-promised Kingdom of God. Jesus was sitting on the mountain side with his disciples when this large concourse of people seeking him came along; quite probably he and the apostles taught the multitude for some time before the miracle of feeding them was performed. We must remember that the Gospel narratives are very brief and pass over small and irrelevant details.

Our Lord, who had already planned the miracle, had led the minds of his disciples up to the point by inquiring, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" This question was addressed to Philip, one of the apostles who lived not far distant. He was the proper person on that account, but probably the Lord had another reason for questioning him. Philip seems to have been of rather a calculating and business turn of mind, and although this disposition is an excellent one to have amongst the disciples of the Lord, it, nevertheless, is inclined to think of earthly means rather than to exercise faith in the Lord. Probably the Lord wished to awaken Philip's thought and specially to bring him profitable instruction and faith through this miracle. Philip's answer that it would require two hundred pennyworth of bread (about \$32.00) to supply the multitude even a light luncheon, shows his business trait. While all the various casts of mind are to be found amongst the Lord's people, the business head is amongst the most useful if it be kept under proper restraints of love and faith; – love, that it may not allow business instincts to take sole charge of spiritual affairs; and faith, that it may be able to realize that although business methods are excellent in all the affairs of life, they must not be permitted to ignore faith in the Lord and the power of his might, and the loving interest which he takes in all the affairs of his Church, the New Creation.

THE USE OF MEANS.

Andrew, whose mind seems to have been less practical than that of Philip, suggested that one of the company had five little barley cakes and two small fishes, yet he had hardly offered the remark when he felt ashamed of it, and added, "But what are they among so many?" Philip was too practical, too much of a business man to have even thought of or mentioned such a morsel of food in connection with the supply of so large a multitude; but our Lord had use not only for the broader mind of Philip but also for the more simple and less logical mind of Andrew, and used the latter's suggestion by calling for the little supply. There is a lesson for us here: it illustrates what many of us have seen in connection with the affairs of the Lord's people, namely, that all the good suggestions, all the helpful suggestions, all those suggestions which make for the interest of the Church, do not always come from one quarter – that often the Lord uses the stumbling lips and illogical reasonings of some of his followers as the basis of blessings to themselves and others, just as now he used Andrew's seemingly foolish remark.

Another thought in this connection is that our Lord seems always to have made use of whatever was at hand. He could have turned the stones into bread and thereby to have fed the multitude; he could have ignored the little supply on hand as insignificant; but this was not his method. All of his followers should learn from this not to despise the little things, but to use them so far as possible. There is a principle involved, too – as our Lord expresses it, He that is faithful in that which is **[R3503 : page 45]** least, will be faithful also in that which is greater. Another lesson is that miracles are only to be expected after we have done all in our power with the means at hand. The colored man had the right idea when, after expressing his faith in the Lord, some one said to him, "Now, George, if the Lord should command you to jump through that stone wall, would you do it?" His answer was that if he were certain that the Lord had commanded it, he would jump at the stone wall and leave to the Lord all that was beyond his

power. If the Lord wished to make a miracle out of it he was able to do so, but the jumping part belonged to George. So it is with us in all life's affairs: we are to be sure that we are in the Lord's way, that we are following his directions, and then we are to leave all the results to him, assured of his ability to work the greatest miracles. Nevertheless, the greatest miracles which any of us have to do with are of a quiet and unostentatious kind. In nature we see these miracles in the growing grain, which, under the Lord's providences, supplies our needs in response to our labor. The increase of the five barley loaves and two little fishes, we may be sure, was not more of a miracle than that which is continually going on in nature, only that it is a different kind, to which we are not accustomed. Nevertheless, as the Lord used the barley cakes and fishes as the nucleus for this miracle, so in nature he uses the seed wheat as the basis for the miracle of the crop gathered in harvest. In other words he always uses means to an end, and the fact that we may see and understand the means does not make the miracle either greater or less. A proper view of life connects the Lord with all the affairs of this life as well as with all that pertains to the life to come.

"WHEN THEY WERE FILLED."

The multitude sat down in groups or companies of fifties and hundreds, we are told, and the disciples distributed to them the five little cakes and two fishes in pieces, which apparently grew as they were broken, much after the manner of the widow's cruse of oil, which flowed incessantly until all the pots had been filled. So this little supply under the Lord's blessing increased, not merely to give a light luncheon to the multitude, but until all were "filled," satisfied, wanted no more. Here was a miracle which not only astounded the disciples but also the thousands; it was what John calls a sign, an evidence and proof of our Lord's supernatural power and authority – a proof that he was indeed the Sent of God, the Messiah. This was the object of the miracle – not the feeding of the multitude. At the very same time there were doubtless hungry ones in various parts of the world whom the

Lord could have fed without any trouble to himself; but he came not to feed the world, he came not to stop the pain and sorrow and dying, but to redeem the world and to give evidence which would allow the apostles and all the Israelites indeed in whom there was no guile to accept him by faith as the Messiah – evidences also which, coming down to us and others of this Gospel age, have been the foundation for our faith.

Some have said, O that we could have been there and witnessed the miracle of the loaves and fishes! Our faith would have been made so strong that we could have been the disciples of Jesus under any and all circumstances and conditions. What a wonder it is that any of those five thousand should ever have doubted our Lord's Messiahship! We answer that those who are truly the Lord's people have similar miracles to-day, because he communicates to us through the Word, and because in eating of the Word we partake of the spirit of our Lord, the spirit of the Truth.

In view of this, which of the Lord's people can gainsay the fact that he is continually, in his own experiences and in the experiences of other Christians, performing a miracle greater than that recorded in our lesson? Which of the Lord's people who have tasted that he is gracious, who have hungered and thirsted after righteousness – Truth – and have had its assisting comfort time and again, could any longer feel that their preference would have been to have lived in the days of our Lord's first advent and to have seen and tasted of the miracles then performed? For our part we much prefer the higher miracles, and consider that we have a stronger basis for faith in these than the poor Jews could possibly have had in all the favors bestowed upon them, great as those favors were.

WEALTH AND ECONOMY BLENDED.

Although our Lord was rich before he came into the world, and although he realized that through the power of God in him he could still have all that was necessary **[R3504 : page 45]** for his well being

and could provide for his followers, too, as shown not only in the miracle before us, the increase of the loaves and fishes, but also shown when, on another occasion, he granted his disciples the great draught of fishes out of the very lake before them – with all this wealth at his command our Lord was a great economist; from his standpoint nothing should be wasted. It was in harmony with this that, after the multitude had been thoroughly fed, the Lord instructed the Apostles to gather up the fragments that nothing be wasted, and they took up twelve haversacks full – each of them gathered the full of his bag or satchel or haversack, in our text called a basket.

There are two lessons in this for us, one a practical lesson on economy, that none of the Lord's blessings and mercies are to be wasted. To some this lesson may come easier than to others, but it is a usual experience in life that willful waste brings woeful want. Quite probably some of the Lord's dear disciples at the present time need to learn the lesson of economy as much as did the disciples and multitude on this occasion. This does not teach the lesson of miserliness either, for the Scriptures declare, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." (Prov. 11:24.) The first lesson was generosity, the secondary lesson was economy. So it should be with us: our generosity should be equal to our disposition to economize. The Lord is not stingy, but generous; and none of his followers should be stingy. The Lord was economical, and that also his disciples should be.

It was those who scattered to others who had their haversacks filled in the end and gained the supply for themselves.

We can apply the same lesson to spiritual things: the Lord's people are to be distributors. We have received of the Lord's bounty, grace and truth freely; we are to distribute freely. Those who distribute will have the privilege of gathering up for themselves, that each may have more than he gave away. How true it is that those who

are most intent upon feeding others with [R3504 : page 46] the bread of life are themselves most bountifully supplied. Let us see to it, then, that we have generosity in respect to the spiritual as well as the natural food. Let us give forth the word of life and the water of life. While we do so from good, honest, sincere hearts, with a desire to honor the Lord and to bless the people, and without selfishness or pride on our own part, we may be sure that he will give us more and more of a rich supply for our own spiritual growth and sustenance.

The multitude took knowledge of the miracle and acclaimed our Lord the great Prophet. By many of them, however, the miracle was only partially appreciated. Doubtless they viewed it as an indication that if Jesus were proclaimed a king, he could supply his soldiers with food without a commissary department; and if he could thus supply the food to his supporters and followers he would be able also to give them the victory under all circumstances and conditions. These things are true, but not true in the way that the natural Israelites supposed. Our Lord giveth us the victory now over sin and selfishness, and leads us on from one achievement to another as we seek to walk in his steps, and all the way he feeds us with the living bread from heaven. In due time he will become the great King over the world, and his power to control and to feed and to put down Satan and all the powers of evil will be fully manifested. Then many of the blind eyes shall be opened – eyes which cannot see the things of faith, ears which cannot hear the message of faith. Let us give thanks to the Lord more and more that our eyes see and our ears hear the message which as yet the world sees not, appreciates not. While this Gospel age can bring special blessings only to those who have the hearing ear and understanding heart and eye of faith, thank God there is another age to come in which all the families of the earth will be abundantly blessed and guided and helped by those who now are able to walk by faith. Only a special class can now appreciate the bread which came down from heaven. By and by, under the blessed influences and arrangements of the Kingdom, all may have the privilege of eating of the bread of life and thus attaining the life everlasting. How our hearts go out to those who

are now starving for this very bread, not only the heathen who have never heard of Christ but many in the lands of civilization who, although they have heard, know not, see not, neither do they understand, neither can they understand until in the Lord's due time their eyes of understanding and ears of appreciation shall be opened, as has been promised through the prophets. – Isa. 35:5; 42:7; 49:9.

"Only five barley loaves!
Only two fishes small!
And can I offer these poor gifts
To Christ, the Lord of all?
To him whose mighty word
Can still the angry sea,
Can cleanse the lepers, raise the dead? –
He hath no need of me."

"Yes, he hath need of thee!
Then bring thy loaves of bread;
Behold, with them, when Jesus speaks,
The multitude are fed."

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