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"GIVE YE THEM TO EAT"
- JOHN 6:1-21. - MARCH 1 -

**Golden Text: – "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd."
– Isa. 40:11.**

THE incidents of this lesson are accredited to the early part of the third year of our Lord's ministry, in the spring, nearing the time of the Passover. John the Baptist had been in the prison at Macherus for about a year and had just been beheaded by King Herod. The ministry of John, followed by the ministry of Jesus, had greatly awakened the Jewish mind on the subject of the imminence of the Kingdom of Messiah. The imprisonment of John had more or less surprised and stunned the people. John himself, after being imprisoned nearly a year, had sent some of his disciples to inquire whether or not Jesus was the Messiah, whether or not he was merely the forerunner of some greater one. This was the truth: Jesus in the flesh, the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world, was merely the forerunner of the heavenly Lord, [R4139 : page 57] who, after gathering from amongst mankind his Elect Bride, will come in power and great glory and assume the reins of the world's government for their blessing and uplifting out of sin-and-death conditions. But Jesus did not enter into an explanation of these things, because they were not meat in due season then. He contented himself with sending the message that the sick were being healed, the devils were being cast out. The good message of the Gospel was being freely preached – all that could then be done, all that was possible to do up to the time of the finishing of the sacrifice at Calvary and its acceptance on the part of Jehovah when our Lord ascended up on high to appear in the presence of God on behalf of believers – to make atonement for their sins, to effect a reconciliation for them with the Father,

and to secure for them the begetting of the holy Spirit, which began at Pentecost.

Subsequently the beheading of John the Baptist spread a measure of consternation amongst those who had appreciated his ministries, including those who recognized the Lord as the Messiah. The religious sentiment of the most religious people was greatly shocked, and considerable excitement prevailed. What might not Herod do next? Would our Lord be safe? Would his apostles, those who trusted in him to save? The matter aroused greater interest and drew larger [R4139 : page 58] crowds to the preaching of Jesus, for, according to the Jewish custom, hundreds of thousands were en route to the usual Passover festival at Jerusalem. Business was practically suspended by a considerable proportion of the population, and as some departed others were coming, and thus our Lord and his apostles were kept for a time extremely busy. It should be remembered, too, that during the year of John's imprisonment our Lord sent forth his disciples and afterward the seventy also, two by two, into various cities of Judea and Galilee, and that they preached repentance and the Kingdom of heaven at hand, and incidentally referred to their Master Jesus as the Messiah. No wonder, then, that hundreds hung upon the Master's words and queried respecting his Messiahship, Is this indeed the very Christ, the true Messiah?

DEPARTED INTO A DESERT PLACE

It was under these circumstances that our Lord with his disciples withdrew in their boat to a desert place across a portion of the Lake of Galilee. They went not to a sandy desert, but to a desert part of the coast, away from the cities and from the large multitude which had gathered. They landed near Bethsaida, the home of Philip, one of the disciples, at the north end of the Lake. Some of the multitude were so deeply interested that, noting the direction in which the boat was steered, they traveled afoot, a

considerable distance, to the same place. Other multitudes coming along the road towards Jerusalem heard also of the presence of the great Teacher in that vicinity and tarried. Presumably our Lord discoursed to them on various topics not recorded. The point of our lesson, the incidents upon which our lesson is based, occurred toward nightfall. The people evidently were so engrossed in what they heard that they were forgetful of their own physical necessities, and our Lord was also apparently neglectful in that he continued to preach to them until the disciples, realizing the situation, suggested telling the people that he would talk to them no more, that it was time for him to move on to the next village, Bethsaida, for refreshment. Apparently the people supplied their simple wants from village to village instead of carrying provisions with them.

"WHENCE SHALL WE BUY BREAD?"

We note our Lord's wise method of instruction. He stimulated thought. Instead of sending the multitude away he proposed to Philip, whose home town was nearest and who therefore would be supposed to be best acquainted with the vicinity, that out of their common funds they would do well to purchase a free luncheon for the multitude, and inquired where the purchase could best be made. Philip was very matter-of-fact, and evidently had a good business head, replying at once, "Two hundred pennyworth [thirty-two dollars' worth] of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." His suggestion was that this would be a considerable sum for them to spend, and that less would do no good. The apostles all joined in this sentiment, according to Luke's account, saying, "Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the towns and country round about and lodge, and get victuals." Pressing the point a little closer Jesus said, They need not go away; give ye them to eat. To this the apostles remonstrated according to Mark, "Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread and give them to eat?" Is this

what you wish us to do? We are ready to do it if you tell us plainly. Jesus replied, according to Mark, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." Andrew, returning from investigating and speaking for all said, "We have found a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fishes, but what are these among so many?" The loaves of that country and time were about the size of a small flat pie and very similar in shape, and the kind of fish described by the Greek word used implied very small fish like herring.

Jesus directed that these supplies be brought to him, and probably they were purchased from the boy. The process of questioning had the effect of stimulating the minds of the disciples, so that by this time, when Jesus said, Cause the multitude to sit down in ranks or rows, in groups of fifties and hundreds upon the grassy slopes, the disciples were ready to obey, even though they could not as yet comprehend fully the purpose of the command; and the confidence of the people in Jesus and his apostles is clearly manifested in the fact that at the late hour they were willing thus to be directed. They had confidence in the Lord up to the point of credulity, and their faith had its reward.

GIVING THANKS ALWAYS FOR ALL THINGS

First of all our Lord gave thanks, lifting up his eyes to heaven. What a lesson he thus set for his disciples and for the multitudes and for all since who regard him as the Sent of God. If the Master himself thus acknowledged that every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of Lights, how much more should all we, who by nature were children of wrath but have been reconciled through the precious blood – how much more should we remember the message, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths." (Prov. 3:6.) Our blessing of the bread does not indeed increase its quantity, its bulk, but surely it does increase its value, its efficiency. The peace, the rest, the contentment which comes from a proper acknowledgment of

divine mercy is of itself a good preparation for our nerves and all our energies as we partake of food. Proportionately the thankful Christian should be less troubled with nervous dyspepsia than are others of the same physical and nervous temperament. Besides this we advise that the Lord's consecrated little ones everywhere, so far as conditions will permit, should follow the custom of the Bible House family, and break together the spiritual manna and feast thereon at the same time that they partake of the earthly food.

The Lord's blessing was followed by the breaking of the barley loaves and fishes and the distribution of the same to the twelve apostles, who in turn delivered them to the multitude, probably through chosen representatives **[R4139 : page 59]** of each company of fifty and a hundred. Thus the distribution was quickly accomplished and a bountiful luncheon enjoyed. But the lesson did not end there, for our Lord instructed the apostles to take their handbags or baskets and gather the fragments, that nothing be wasted, and a sufficient supply was found to fill the twelve baskets. The miracle astonished all and especially impressed, we may be sure, the apostles. It is not for us to explain the miracle, though miracle it would still be even if we were able to explain it. It is for us to recognize that God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and that miracles are in operation about us every day: the seed germinates and grows, we know not how; but seed sowing and harvesting are intimately associated, and we can trace the results, but the process by which the five loaves and two fishes were so increased in bulk we cannot trace; hence we speak of this as a miracle – that is, an operation of divine power beyond our comprehension more than are the average affairs of life. It is well for us to note how little we know at best, and how many miracles are happening about us all the time. We can analyze a grain of wheat and could construct something very closely corresponding, but we could give it no life, no germ, no power to produce. We see the corn and the oats and realize that they are valuable for food for man and for beast, but it is beyond our power

to comprehend their transformation into human flesh and form, as well as into the flesh and form of swine and cattle of all kinds with their various peculiarities of skin, hair, feathers, hoofs, horns, etc. These are miracles, too, but so common that we overlook them.

THE LESSON OF SUPERNATURAL POWER

A lesson which undoubtedly came to the disciples and to the multitude in connection with the miracle we are considering was that Christ had superhuman powers which attested him as Messiah, the Sent of God, for "no man can do these miracles which thou doest except God be with him." Again, it was, especially to the apostles, a lesson of the Lord's ability to care for them as his followers, under all circumstances, under all conditions, and this lesson continues with all of his followers since. Our Master is still able both in temporal and in spiritual matters to do for us exceedingly abundantly more than we could ask or think – "No good thing will he withhold from those that walk uprightly," from those who are his true followers. Their best interests will be preserved and conserved. We may safely take from this matter a lesson in faith – "Greater **[R4140 : page 59]** is he that is on our part than all they that be against us." As the apostles learned this lesson, the very fear of Herod and what he might do to Jesus or to them gave way, and they were ready by nightfall at the command of our Lord to return again to the vicinity of Capernaum. Jesus himself appears to have retired for secret communion with the Father. He sent the disciples before, not only as a test of their obedience, but also that he might give them a still further demonstration of the divine power which attended him. The sea was boisterous; they were delayed in reaching port, and were rowing – presumably because of contrary winds – when behold Jesus approached the ship walking upon the waters. He quieted their fears by the declaration, "It is I, be not afraid." They received him into the ship and immediately they were at land.

Was there a picture in this experience? Did it represent the boisterous and troubled experience of the Church throughout this Gospel Age? Did it represent that at the end of the age, in the midst of a great storm, the Lord would appear to his people, and that upon being received by them their outward troubles and difficulties would completely vanish, only by reason of their fellowship with him and the grace and peace which he would give through his message, "Be not afraid"?

NOT A MISSIONARY LESSON

The committee arranging these International lessons designed and requested that this lesson should be used as a missionary lesson to the intent that the cause of foreign missions might be brought prominently to the attention of the Lord's people everywhere. We are glad of this; we have great sympathy with every sentiment and effort looking toward the uplift of mankind out of degradation and sin into the light and the truth, and thus into harmony with God.

Many have misinterpreted our views respecting missionary work in foreign lands. We think it much to the credit of missionaries that they have been willing to leave their homes and money-making opportunities to engage in the missionary work, even though many of them have gone with full assurances of as good or better comforts than they enjoyed at home, and even though the greater part of missionary work is no more religious than is the teaching of the public schools in their home land, or the practice of medicine and hospital work done by many physicians in civilized lands. Surely the poor heathen greatly need civilizing influences, medical assistance and better education. We are glad that they are getting them.

What we object to in respect to these foreign missions is: –

(1) That the same imperfect Gospel, or mixture of truth and error, is presented to the heathen that is presented here in the home land; and (2) because the idea prevails that this is God's method for fulfilling the item of our Lord's prayer which declares, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." We object to this view because it is thoroughly unscriptural, and, as we have repeatedly pointed out, is thoroughly irrational. Our Post-Millennial friends, while telling us that they are striving to convert the world and thus to establish the will of God on earth even as it is done in heaven, prepare statistics which show to everybody that the number of the heathen in the year 1800 was approximately 600,000,000, and that their number today is approximately 1,200,000,000 – just double. Is it not foolishness to insist on mission work from this standpoint? Let the mission work go on, but let it be viewed from the right standpoint. Who is so blind as not to be able to see that if [R4140 : page 60] the whole heathen world were converted to the same measure of civilization and Christianity as is possessed by so-called Christendom, it would still be in a wretched plight, as witness our Lord's address to the latter in its last stage, the Laodicean period, I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, that thy nakedness do not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see, for thou art poor and miserable and blind and naked. – Rev. 3:17,18.

Let us have the right Scriptural view of matters, namely, that God during this Gospel Age is seeking a "Little Flock," the "Very Elect," and is gathering them from every nation, people, kindred and tongue. These are to constitute with their Lord and Bridegroom the Seed of Abraham, through whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed. Let us see that this is what the Apostle says, "If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's Seed and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:29.) Let us see that the Kingdom is to be given to this Seed of Abraham; that Christ and his Elect Church, his Bride, are to constitute the Kings and Priests

who shall reign on the earth (Rev. 5:10), and through whom, as the Melchizedek order of priesthood, every son and daughter of Adam may have fullest opportunity of attaining a full salvation from sin and from death – a full release from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God! Let us see that those who shall ultimately prove incorrigible shall not be eternally tormented, but, as the Scriptures declare, shall be "punished with everlasting destruction," "destroyed from amongst the people!" (2 Thess. 1:9; Acts 3:23.) Those whose eyes are anointed with the unction from the Holy One to thus see the divine plan, realize well that God is not now engaged in the work of saving the world, but merely, as the Scriptures put it, "taking out of the nations a people for his name" – to bear his name, to be the Bride of Christ; and they all know that the Gospel can have no other meaning to the heathen than it has to the Christian nations.

DISCOURAGEMENTS FROM ERROR

No wonder thinking people who do not see the true plan of God in respect to the gathering of the Elect, and who have previously been zealous for the heathen under the erroneous belief that all except the converts of Christianity were doomed to an eternity of torture, are now ceasing to believe in eternal torment, and are going to the other extreme in supposing that nearly all the heathen go to heaven when they die, and that heaven has a vast slum district for their reception and education – no wonder that these are losing their zeal for foreign missions, that the money is coming proportionately more slowly, and much of it from those who are interested in the heathen from a humanitarian rather than from the religious standpoint!

It is pathetic to notice how otherwise honest and intelligent people have deceived themselves and others respecting the true situation of affairs in the world. We reproduce a diagram, published by "The Young People's Missionary Movement," which

shows the abject darkness of the heathen, enlightened only here and there by missionary endeavors, represented by stars. It is shown as a cause for further missionary effort. But look at the other half, represented in pure white: –

Protestants	166,066,500
Roman Catholics	272,638,500
Easterns, Greek Catholics, etc	120,157,000
Jews	11,000,000
Mohammedans	216,630,000
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Total	786,492,000

But how fair is this statement? How true is it? On the diagram it is represented as one-half, yet the total of the world's population today is recognized as about 1,700,000,000, so that really a much larger proportion of the picture should show black. But let us examine more carefully who are the Mohammedans. We regret to say that a good many Christian people would not know but that they were another denomination of Christians – like the Mormons, for instance. But instead they are heathen in the sense of not recognizing Christ, respecting whom the Apostle says, "There is none other name given under heaven and amongst men whereby we must be saved." ([Acts 4:12.](#)) Are they not as much unsaved as are the ones represented by the black portion? Are they not as much in the dark? Have we any reason to suppose that they are any more honest? And what about the Jews? Are they saved from the Christian standpoint? On the contrary both Catholics and Protestants deny this, and missionaries and mission stations are now in operation amongst both Jews and Mohammedans with a view to their conversion, just as with the heathen.

Examining still more closely we find that the nearly 400,000,000 of Roman and Greek Catholics are also subjects for

mission work by Protestants, that Protestant missions are maintained even in the city of Rome itself and in various Catholic countries at the expense of the Protestants residing in Great Britain and the United States, with a view to counteracting, they tell us, the influence of "Anti-christ." How does it come that the good, honest people, so zealous to save others, have presented so misleading a picture of the state of the world? We answer, it is because their theology [R4140 : page 61] is wrong. After nearly nineteen centuries of endeavor they can scarcely give up their position that God has appointed that the truth shall in this way reach and convert the whole world, thus bringing about a reign of righteousness in which God's will shall be done on earth as in heaven. Their theory has been badly shattered and shaken by the truth on the subject. They want to make the picture as favorable as possible for their theory. They are scarcely conscious of the dishonesty they are thus practicing in the name of the Lord.

But look still more closely at the only division of the diagram we have not yet considered, the section showing the Protestants. Surely, says some, you will concede that at least this portion of the diagram is right. Alas, we reply, we wish that we could think of the Protestants of the world (166,066,500) as being saints of God, in whom his will is done on earth as in [R4141 : page 61] heaven – or even to the extent of their imperfect ability. We cannot so think; we cannot delude ourselves thus. We regret the lack of conscience on the part of those who made the diagram, and on the part of many others, which hinders them from being honest with themselves on the subject. For the purposes of such enumeration not even Church membership is taken, although everybody of reasonable judgment would admit that nominal Church membership would be a poor proof of saintliness. The number is made up of everybody living in civilized lands who is neither a Jew nor a Roman Catholic. As Bishop Foster once suggested it includes not only the black but the ring-streaked and

speckled, the number of the white, the saintly, being extremely small.

AWAKE, OH ZION, PUT ON THY STRENGTH!

"Blow ye a trumpet in Zion!" It is time that all of God's true people, whoever and wherever, Catholic or Protestant, should awake to a realization that we have been living under a great delusion – under a total misapprehension of the divine Word first started in the "dark ages." It is time that all the saints should come clearly to understand that their hope is not in the conversion of heathendom, but in the second coming of the Lord and the gathering of his saints, and their change to his likeness in the First Resurrection, and in the Kingdom, the dominion over the earth which will then be established through them – the Millennial Kingdom. Then and by that power Satan will be bound for the thousand years, that he may deceive the nations no more, that the blindness that has been upon not only heathendom but Christendom may pass away, and that the true light may shine forth – the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in its beams. It is for this Kingdom that we are to pray, with the realization that when it shall come the result of its rule shall be the complete abolition of sin and death and the establishment of a reign of righteousness in the world, even as it is in heaven.

The present mission of the Church is, as the Scriptures declare, to "make herself ready." This includes a knowledge of Christ, and the extending of this knowledge as far as possible, a knowledge of our justification through faith in his blood, and a knowledge of our call to joint-heirship with him in his Kingdom, and a knowledge that faithfulness to this call will mean a full consecration on our part to serve the Truth, to live the Truth, to suffer for the Truth, and that to the called, the chosen and the faithful the Kingdom is to be given at the second coming of our Lord, and that the attainment of that position of joint-heirship in

the throne is dependent upon our willingness to stand for the Truth and for the Lord, to endure hardness as good soldiers, and to lay down our lives for the brethren, thus suffering with Christ that we may also be glorified together.

The Church's mission is not different from that of her Master, except that it is world-wide instead of being confined to the Jewish nation. Each one who receives of the holy Spirit is represented by the Lord as being a candle, a little light in the world, and each is to let his light shine before men. It is for the Lord to supervise the general interests of these lights, and to send them hither and thither as it may please him unto "even so many as the Lord your God shall call." (Acts 2:39.) It is quite proper that Christian people everywhere should have their attention called to the real significance of their justification, their sanctification, and the proper characters they should develop in order to make their calling and election sure. Whoever is thus engaged is about the Master's business, and is therefore one of his mission workers. Each should now be laboring in that corner of the harvest field where he has the best opportunity for serving the cause, and this would mean that after witnessing for the Truth in our own neighborhoods we may carry the message as much as possible into other neighborhoods, into other cities, into other states, into other lands. Thus, as the number of lighted candles increases under the Lord's providential arrangement, some would probably be lighted for other lands – not to convert all but, as the Scriptures declare, to bear witness to the Truth.

OUR LESSON'S MISSION PICTURE

The lesson represents well the view we have set forth, but does not at all represent the view of mission work generally entertained. It will be noticed that those who were fed were not heathen but Israelites, the people of God – then in covenant favor. It should be noticed secondly that Jesus dealt first with his

disciples, who represented the Elect, his chosen ones. To these he gave the bread he broke, which, after the multitude were seated, was distributed amongst them. So the Lord has now called the Church to be his Elect, and broken for them the bread of life or Truth, and by and by in his own due time the whole world of mankind, including those who have gone down into the prison-house of death, shall all come forth – every man in his own order, in his own rank, in his own company, and then the multitude will be ready for the food, and it will be given them, and they shall have an abundance and to spare.

