

OUR HUNGRY WORLD

"He hath filled the hungry with good things." Luke 1:53.

Have you ever been hungry? Do you know what it is to be really hungry? Most of us are compelled to say that we do not know what real hunger is. Nevertheless, we do live in a hungry world. The variety, the quality and the intensity of our hungers are matters not to be laughed off.

I. The Hunger For Food.

People are hungry for food. There is the normal hunger for food. Christ never said, "Man shall not live by bread." What He said was: "Man shall not live by bread alone."

Excepting growing boys, perhaps, Americans do not know much about gnawing hunger. You see, some people eat (if they get food) because they are so desperately hungry; some people eat because they are beginning to be hungry; but hordes of Americans eat just to keep from getting hungry.

Most of us, I suspect, have too little care about the abnormal hunger that exists in our world today. Perhaps two-thirds of the world's population go to bed hungry night after night. These millions of victims of malnutrition have a life expectancy that on the whole is less than half of that of the people in the United States.

In the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations there is concern, along with considerable disagreement, over the question of whether sufficient food can be provided for the enormously increased world population we are to have in the next few years. They tell us that the number of births exceeds the number of deaths by 70,000 every twenty-four hours. A world population which stands today at roughly two billion and a half is heading toward four billion at the end of this century.

Can they all find bread, or its Asian equivalent which is rice? Some say, yes; some, no. Regardless, what we do know is that even now millions are hungry. An adequate diet is simply not to be had.

Does Christ care about all of this physical hunger that puts pallor on human faces and shrinks the flesh on human bones? The man who says He doesn't must be a man who has never read the four Gospels.

Look at the Christ Who fed the five thousand. A lad presented to Christ five loaves and two fishes, which was all that he had. Christ took the loaves, gave thanks, distributed them to His disciples, and they in turn distributed them to the people. This multiplication of the bread and fish in Christ's hands continued until the hunger of every one of the five thousand people had been satisfied. Then Christ commanded the disciples to gather up the fragments so that nothing would be wasted. These fragments filled twelve baskets. There were more fragments left than there were loaves when they began to serve.

As we might expect, Christ did not go on feeding men by sheer miracle day after day. That would have ruined them. Too much miracle would make us too lazy; too little miracle would leave us blind to the supernatural. Our Lord gives the right balance.

What is most urgent is that we understand His concern for persons as persons. Beyond grasping this concern, we need to share it.

The sharing, moreover, must be not only in the form of "relief," such as clothing, "Care" packages and dollars. It must be in the form of support for those measures that will open up to earth's hungry millions a decent chance at the necessities of life. It means that you and I as Christians should seize every opportunity of encouraging the economic development of backward peoples. It means that we should be for and not against the giving of a fair chance at raw materials and world markets to peoples who are struggling for an improved standard of living.

Our churches as such cannot do this. This indeed is not their direct business. But, the churches should constantly produce men whom Christ has redeemed and saved and whose intelligence and conscience are dedicated to these high purposes.

When Christian leaders in England set about to do something for the poor and the hungry in the early days of the industrial revolution, they did more than concern themselves with relief. They concerned themselves with justice. So your Richard Cobdens, John Brights and Lord Shaftesburys used their Christian influence to bring about legislation that would lighten the unbearable load of injustice and inhumanity that millions of Englishmen were forced to carry.

A similar concern is needed now if many more millions of hungry Asians are not to fall under the false and fatal spell of Communism.

One feels like saying, "O world, hungry for bread, listen! Christ Jesus cares! Through people whom He can influence and in whose hearts He can dwell by His Spirit, He will bring to you something far closer to justice than anything you now know."

II. The Hunger For Freedom.

Freedom is one of the basic facts of man's nature and existence. It was born the day that God made him as a creature of thought and choice.

But, freedom in man, like everything else human, is not absolute. It is limited. If the Bible account of the creation and fall of man means anything to us, it must mean that human freedom, in order to be preserved, must have an anchor. Eat of everything except this. Stop here! You are not God. You are man.

Adam did not stop, as we know. He abused his freedom, profaned his power of choice, broke his fellowship with God and thereby started a thousand forms of slavery in the experiences of men.

It is here that we begin the real wrestle with truth over this whole question of freedom. Let me put it this way: until man the self-willed, sinning creature of God becomes man the surrendered child of God, the craving for freedom, which will not die, is a twisted thing and is always experiencing some sort of frustration.

For example, take the case of the people of Judah. Ahaz was king. He was invited to join an alliance with the King of Syria and the King of Israel. He refused. When threatened, he and his advisors proposed that they form a protective alliance with Assyria. Isaiah said, "No, don't do it! Keep free of partnership with pagans!"

The prophet's advice was disregarded. Therefore, he warned that the very self-preservation in which the leaders were interested would be destroyed by the Assyrian power on which they were going to rely and by the war with Syria and Israel which they were going to provoke.

Concerning the citizens of Jerusalem, Isaiah said, "Many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken" (Isaiah 8:15). Blindly chasing freedom, they would fall into bitter bondage.

But, that is not all. Stragglers in Judah, wretched souls who managed to escape captivity, would wander up and down the land, as Isaiah said, "greatly distressed and hungry; and when they are hungry, they will be enraged, and will curse their king and their God" (Isaiah 8:21).

Oh, the ironies of history! Again and again we see it: men will not make God and His will the anchor of their freedom; and then, when the storm comes, they blame Him for the battering to pieces of their ship. If they don't blame Him, they blame somebody or something other than themselves.

Think of Germany after World War I. Here was a defeated nation hemmed in and held down by all manner of punishing restrictions. Of course the hunger for freedom was there, but instead of great penitence there was great pride. Instead of turning to the Bible and to faith in Jesus Christ, the people turned to Adolph Hitler and Mein Kampf. Hitler, not Christ, would be their deliverer. Hitler, not Christ, would be their master. Hitler, not Christ, would give them their place in the world.

All of us know what happened. In the horror and havoc of World War II Hitler carried down with him the great nation of Germany in a heap of rubble and humiliation. In the years that have followed half of the nation has come under the tyranny of Russia, and vast multitudes among the West Germans, especially the younger ones, have become bitter, cynical and uncaring about anything.

If men, whether as individuals or nations, will not find their real freedom in Christ, they will find a deadlier bondage outside of Him. If they will not experience in Him the "new birth" He offers, the release from selfishness He gives, the reverence for personality that He imparts, the devotion to truth that He inspires, then their freedom-hungry hearts are doomed to ruinous slavery.

Christ is "the bread of life," including the food of freedom for which men so deeply, if sometimes blindly, long. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Real freedom is based on truth and is imparted through sonship. True freedom comes to us through the Son of God. Christ is the great emancipator. His aim is to make all men free. He provides deliverance from past guilt, exoneration from the punishment of sin, liberty from the fear of death, admission into the family of God and the supply of our needs.

"Once I was bound by sin's galling fetters,
Chained like a slave I struggled in vain,
But I received a glorious freedom
When Jesus broke my fetters in twain.

"Glorious freedom, wonderful freedom,
No more in chains of sin I repine!
Jesus, the glorious Emancipator,
Now and forever He shall be mine."

III. The Hunger For Fellowship.

We are not whole of ourselves. Our lives must be intertwined with God and with others if they are to be satisfactory.

When we do not have healthy and satisfying relations with God and with others, what happens? Since the craving for fellowship is there and will not die, you will have on your hands a variety of false fellowships. Go back to Isaiah's day. These men in Judah would not find their fellowship with God and with men like Isaiah. They would not join their hearts in a united seeking of God's mind and will. So what did they

do but resort to the mysterious and mischievous fellowship of those who practiced black magic, divination and necromancy?

The New Testament word which is translated "fellowship" is a very significant one. It means to have things in common--common interests, activity and participation. It involves reciprocal knowledge, reciprocal love and reciprocal endeavor. Real fellowship means knowing each other better, loving each other more and doing things for each other. Fellowship is not a one-way affair. A friend reveals his mind to me, and I reveal my mind to him; he gives his love to me, and I give my love to him. Fellowship carries the idea of sharing one's love and life. How our hearts yearn for fellowship with our friends! Friendship makes life worth living. Aristotle spoke of friendship as "one soul abiding in two hearts." There is no joy comparable to fellowship with a true friend. Emerson said, "The essence of friendship is entireness, a total magnanimity and trust. A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere; before whom I may think aloud." How grateful we should be that God has made it possible for us to have a friend or friends like that!

Mary was certainly right when she said prophetically concerning her Son: "He hath filled the hungry with good things"--the good things of communion with God and a high and sustaining comradeship with the children of God.

If this Christ fills "the hungry with good things," it is because they take Him as "the bread of life." Has your God-hungry spirit taken Him as your life, your strength and your satisfaction?

A missionary to India told the story of a passenger on a train in India who was given a copy of John's Gospel. When he saw that it was part of the Christian's Bible, he became angry, tore the little book into small pieces and flung them out of the window. Members of a section gang were working on the railroad, and one of these tiny bits of paper fluttered down at the feet of a workman. He picked it up and read in his own language a fragment of a sentence in which the three words that stood out were: "bread of life." "That is just what I need," he said. "Where can I get it?" Someone warned him that since the phrase was from a Christian book, he would be contaminated if he used the book. But, he refused to be turned aside in his quest. At length he found a small Christian group; and, through fellowship with its members, through listening to their testimony and through following their instruction in the New Testament, he found the Christ Himself.

That uncultured Indian coolie found in Christ something that some of you have never found. Won't you let this Saviour say to you just now, deep within your soul, "I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger"?