

FEEDING THE MULTITUDE

Mark 6:30-44

The disciples had been sent forth to preach and to heal. Because of this forth-sending they were here called apostles. It was early spring and they had all returned to make their reports and to tell Christ all that they had done. This had been their first tour without Him. There is no list of deeds nor any schedule of results. They went over with Him the things they had said. They told all to the Lord from Whom they had received their message, from Whom they had derived their power and to Whom alone they were responsible. As they talked excitedly Christ quietly listened and mentally judged it all. He did not say what He thought about their report, but how glad He was they told Him all.

As Christ looked at these men and listened to them He noted the fact of their physical weariness. He proposed a retreat saying, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile." In other words, we will not go to any place where we will have to talk, but we will get into the boat and cross the sea where we can rest. Every word of what Christ said was significant, "Come," that is, with Me. "Ye yourselves," that is, by yourselves, just you alone. "Apart," privately. "Into a desert place," to secure privacy. "Rest," after toil. "Awhile," not forever. There are times when it is a duty to rest, and to work at such times is a sin. Since Christ needed rest, His servants do also. By working strength is used up and needs to be renewed. It is wiser to burn on than to burn out. Christ knew that these men were tired, and He said, "Come and rest awhile."

They entered a boat and made a short voyage of ten or twelve miles of quietness and physical rest. What follows shows that the time of much-needed rest may be invaded, and unexpected claims made upon our time and strength. Often the crowds were inconsiderate, but Christ was not annoyed by their intrusion. When they landed on the shore, crowds were awaiting their arrival. The shepherd heart of Christ went out in compassion toward the multitudes of needy humanity, because they impressed Him as sheep without a shepherd. They were looking for guidance, and really hungering for spiritual truth. The professional teachers of formal religion had not satisfied them. John the Baptist had been beheaded. They were conscious of great need which they believed that Christ was able to supply. Even though their faith was imperfect and their hopes indefinite, Christ gladly responded to their appeal. "He began to teach them many things." Note that He taught them before He fed them. Man's spiritual need is always of more importance than his physical.

When the day was far spent the apostles reminded Christ that they were in a desert place, that the lunch hour was far passed, and suggested that He send the crowd into the near-by villages that they might obtain food for themselves. The sight of this weary multitude, far from home and without a meal, touched the Master. He was no ascetic, neglecting the physical and thinking only of the spiritual.

Christ startled the apostles by the command: "Give ye them to eat." In reply they stated their inability to furnish an adequate supply of food. When they inquired about how to get bread enough, Christ asked them how many loaves they had. Andrew, who was always looking for opportunities to serve his Lord, remarked, "There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves, and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" In the eyes of the apostles it was nothing. In the eyes of Christ it was sufficient.

The apostles confessed their inability to feed the multitude. Their only desire was to send them away. They had not brought the people there, they were not responsible for their condition and they were ready to wash their hands of all responsibility. This attitude toward responsibility is so natural and so easy. It is the easiest way out, and most people follow that path when difficulties arise. The attitude of some professing Christians toward cases of charity is to disclaim all responsibility for them and to refuse

to do anything about them. This is the way of least resistance. The disciples advised Christ to "send the multitude away." In their advice was both presumption and a lack of faith. They did not understand the Lord's majesty, love and power. They never thought that their indifference would be described to all generations. If they lived long enough to read this story in the public records, doubtless they were ashamed of their attitude towards the hungry multitudes on that day.

Moreover, the apostles magnified the insufficiency of the lunch which was available. "There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" In other words, "The little that we can do is so insignificant, so unimportant that it is not worth doing." This seemed to be their confession. Men usually take delight in magnifying their weaknesses rather than their strength when responsibilities are to be met. They discredit what they can do and parade their limitations. They cling to their doubts and ignore opportunities. They invite failure rather than success. Too often men train their eyes and ears for flaws, discords, specks, and mistakes rather than for their opposites. They are inclined to live within the limitations of their weaknesses. When they are challenged by the things of life, they are quick to determine the battle on the basis of their own weakness, forgetting the limitless wisdom and power of God offered to them.

This lad did not have much, but he had something. That small something he had brought for himself on his picnic. But this lad was not poor. The mountains were his to behold. Not poor at all, because all the songs of the birds were his. Not poor, for God leases this universe to all who have spiritual capacity to appreciate it. These five loaves and two fishes did not seem very much to the boy; in fact, just enough to satisfy his hunger. It is to the credit of this lad that he gave what he had to the Lord. Because he relinquished his all to Christ he stands in the Lord's hall of fame today. Bring to the Lord what you have and dedicate it to Him. However small it may be, He will multiply it.

Christ bade the multitude to sit down in groups. He wanted order and not confusion. This was done in order that the disciples could move freely among them. Proper organization is very important. It shortens the distance between points, increases the speed of achievement and lubricates the gears of operation. Our Lord then took the loaves and the fishes, thanked God for them, blessed them, broke them and gave them to the apostles, who in turn gave them to the multitude and they all ate until they were filled. In like manner, Christ teaches us, fills us with His grace, girds us with His power and sends us forth as the bearers of His blessings to mankind.

Our Lord set His approval upon the services of men. By the use of men and their money and their organizing ability, Christ builds His churches and fosters His cause on the earth. It is glorious to be a worker with the Lord, whether it is in the feeding of the multitude, winning souls to Christ or developing the characters of men. The physician may become a worker with God in healing the sick bodies of men; the teacher may become a worker with Him by enlightening the benighted minds of men; the kind-hearted neighbor may become God's helper by bringing about better living conditions in the community; the preacher of the gospel may become a worker with Him in presenting God's truth to the souls of people.

This lad reached out from himself to others through Christ. This lad reached out to many and filled their hands with food through the hands of Christ. He reached out beyond the day in which he lived, even to the days in which we live, in influence for the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord will engthen out or multiply anything which is yielded or dedicated to Him. If you will present your talents and possessions to Christ, your worth will be multiplied greatly. Three words, possession, presentation and multiplication, tell the story of each life that is gloriously lived for the Lord.