

## MEETING LIFE'S EMERGENCIES

Mark 8:1-9; cf. Matthew 15:32-39

Christ was in the region of Decapolis. A great multitude had followed Him for the purpose of witnessing His miracles and of hearing those gracious words of divine wisdom which flowed from His blessed lips. In their eagerness to accompany Him they had neglected to make due provision for their physical needs. Having continued with Him for three days, they were a great distance from their homes and without anything to eat. It was as true then as it is now that a hungry crowd does not make the best kind of an audience for a preacher, even though he be the Saviour Himself. A man is more likely to be thinking of his stomach than of the needs of his soul, so the Lord decided to take care of the situation.

Christ had compassion on the multitude. These words, "compassion" and "multitude," are inseparably linked together and give us a wonderfully beautiful picture of the Master among sinners. Compassion is one of the greatest words in the human language. The more we study it the more it gets hold of us. In many respects it is a stronger word than "love," because it embraces it. Compassion is love in action. Literally the word means to move toward. Christ so loved the multitude that He acted in their behalf. He moved toward them with His heart of love and His hand of help. Compassion always carries with it the idea of love linked to labor or heart joined to hand.

It is interesting to note how the word "compassion" is used in the Gospels. When the father saw the Prodigal Son coming home in rags, without shoes and hungry, "he had compassion on him." He was moved toward him. It is used of the good Samaritan. When the good Samaritan came along down the road and heard the groaning of a man, he was moved toward him. It is used of the master of the debtor. When the servant who owed his lord more than he could pay said, "have patience with me," his master was moved toward him. It is used of the Lord Jesus with reference to four persons. When He saw the leper, He was moved toward him. When He saw the two blind men and heard their cry for help, He was moved toward them. When He saw the grief of the widow of Nain, He was moved toward her. There are three occasions in which it is used of the multitude, when He saw the sick, the tired and the hungry.

Because Christ had compassion on the multitude of the hungry folk in the desert, He was unwilling to send them away without providing food for them. He not only noticed their hunger at the moment, but He also foresaw what would come of it. While their immediate hunger touched the Saviour, He was not unmindful of its later consequences. They would go back to their homes in the mountains, but on the way some of them would faint and fall in sheer exhaustion because of the lack of proper food. The very thought of this aroused His sympathy, and He was moved toward the multitude.

Faced with this pressing problem of the famishing multitude, Christ asked His disciples, "How many loaves have ye?" They replied, "Seven, and a few little fishes." It is not surprising that the disciples declared their inability to meet the emergency and to supply the needs of the multitude. After commanding the multitude to sit down on the ground, Christ took the meager provisions which they had and expressed thanks unto God for them. In doing this He taught the importance of using the bounties of God's

providence with thankfulness. He wants all who partake of His mercies to acknowledge them devoutly and openly. If Christ, in whose hands the loaves and fishes multiplied, would not distribute without first giving thanks, how much more are we bound to be thankful for those supplies of food which day after day we are permitted to enjoy. How terrible to eat and drink while ungratefully forgetting the Giver! After He had given thanks for the loaves and fishes, our Lord multiplied them and gave them to the disciples, who in turn served the waiting multitude. He made that small amount of food more than enough to satisfy the needs of the thousands who were present. Having supplied their needs and satisfied their hunger, our Lord commanded His disciples to gather up the fragments so that a waste might be averted.

Whether temporal or spiritual, God's gifts are never to be wasted. He gives with a splendid liberality, but He does so in order that His gifts may be used and not wasted. When the disciples took up what was left, it was enough to fill seven baskets. The disciples found that, while thus obeying the orders of Christ in feeding the multitude, there was still left in the fragments that remained the same provision as at first to supply their own needs. They not only had enough, but there was plenty to spare. There is always something left over when God gives. On every occasion, when our Lord performed a miracle of this nature, we find that the fragments which were left either equalled or exceeded the original supply. This was designed to show that the power of Christ was by no means exhausted, nor His means of relief in the least degree impoverished by the numbers that He had to feed. What a cheering truth is this to reflect upon that, however great and urgent may be the wants of men and however many there may be, we have One to apply to, whose divine power and goodness are alike inexhaustible and Who is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think! Let us learn from this incident that whatever we may expend for the sake of Christ He will repay.

There is a remarkable display of the thoughtfulness and kindness of our Saviour in this miracle. The perception of a need was followed immediately by the miraculous supply of it. This is the way in which He deals with His followers in spiritual matters. When He gives us a work to do, He gives us everything that is necessary for its performance. When He lays a cross upon us, He also furnishes us with what is necessary to sustain us under it. When He sends us on a journey, He exercises great care to supply us with His grace so that we shall not faint by the way.

Upon seeing the hunger, thirst and needs of the multitude, Christ was moved toward them to help them. Do you have a compassion for the multitude akin to His? True compassion is love in action. Never forget that fact. Christ chose to use the provisions which were at hand when He fed the multitude. This proves that He does not despise nor dispense with human means or agencies. Moreover, when He provides there is always more than enough for the needs of any and all.

Ever remember that Christ calls us to tasks for which our resources are entirely inadequate. The work to which He calls us always lies in the region of the humanly impossible. Preaching and teaching get nowhere if they accomplish only what we can do in our own strength. Real success comes from facing and doing the humanly impossible. One thinks of David Livingstone, who was beset by so much ignorance, superstition, vice and cruelty that a less courageous spirit would have surrendered and quit. Yet, without his efforts where would Africa be today? Phillips Brooks put his finger on our need when he told us not to pray for tasks equal to our powers but for strength equal to our tasks.

In all that is committed to our charge, we must strive to be good stewards of the manifold gifts of God. Let us turn everything to a good account. In the use of our time, talents and possessions, let us be careful that nothing be lost. It is a sin to waste or lose time, talents and opportunities.

When you are confronted with some emergency in life which, at first glance, appears to out-measure your ability altogether, follow the example of our Saviour in this remarkable incident. Take an inventory of what resources and ability you do possess. Christ said, "How many loaves have ye?" This is always His question when an emergency arises. Take an inventory of your knowledge, energy, love and opportunity. Then, when an emergency arises, remember your past mercies. Remember what God has done for you already. Then, in emergencies, with your meager loaves and few fish, enter into special partnership with Christ. "He took the seven loaves and the few small fishes." The disciples were willing for Him to take them. An emergency often forces us into more dependence on and a closer nearness to the Lord. In emergencies, always put the will of Christ into practice.

God's Word tells us that the hungry multitude ate and were filled. The glorious thing about salvation and all of God's other gifts is the fact that they fully supply and completely satisfy every need of the soul. Moreover, it is encouraging to remember that the Lord's power is not exhaustible. The two great needs of the hungry soul, which our Saviour is ever ready to supply, are grace and peace. These spiritual gifts are as necessary for the soul's comfort as bread is for the sustaining, strengthening and refreshing of our bodies. Since our Lord is unchanging, what He has done for other people He can and will do for us under similar circumstances. He, Who fed more than four thousand from seven loaves of bread and a few small fish, will not find it hard to feed your hungry soul.

"The King of heaven His table spreads,  
And dainties crown His board.  
Not all the boasted joys of earth  
Could such delight afford.

"Pardon and peace to dying men,  
And endless life are given;  
And the rich blood that Jesus shed  
To raise our souls to heaven.

"Thousands of souls in glory now,  
Were fed and feasted here;  
And thousands more still on the way  
Around the board appear."

Are you one of these blessed ones?