

CHRIST AND THE MULTITUDES

Matthew 14 and 15

We are living in a day when great emphasis is placed on the multitude. Misfortune draws people in great numbers, whether it be a fire, a wreck, or a tragic killing. Crowds gather easily for entertainment and amusement, as in athletic contests and sporting events.

Our Saviour was a great crowd-gatherer. The multitudes came to hear Him and especially to see His miracles.

After the death of John the Baptist, Christ took His apostles and withdrew into a solitary place. Immediately the people followed Him. Let us see the multitudes as Jesus saw them. He saw the total number, but He also saw the individual. We must do the same. Christ dealt with the multitudes, but He also dealt with the individual. As we think of the multitudes, let us also think of the individual. Our Saviour was concerned about the crowds, but He was also concerned about an individual sinner coming unto Him.

I. The Eyes Of Christ Jesus -- To See.

"And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14).

Oh, that we could see people as our Lord saw them. He saw them sick and weak. He did not laugh at them. He did not ridicule their weaknesses. He saw them as they were, recognized their needs, and did something for them.

Oppressed with grief over the beheading of John the Baptist and longing for seclusion, the Lord Jesus crossed the lake to a place near Bethsaida. There He was deprived of privacy when He craved it most. A great throng of people followed Him. The crowds followed Him with such enthusiasm that they forgot to provide the necessary food for themselves. When the evening was come, they were in the wilderness where there were no ordinary means of providing for their hunger. The sight of the weary multitude, far from home and without a meal, touched the Master.

When Jesus looked upon that large company of weary and hungry people, He said to that matter-of-fact man, Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Philip replied, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them that everyone of them may take a little." Andrew, who was always looking for opportunities to serve his Lord, remarked, "Here is a lad here, who has five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" In the eyes of Christ they were sufficient.

Confessing their inability to feed the multitude, and wanting to wash their hands of all responsibility, the disciples advised Christ to "send the multitude away."

When the disciples magnified the insufficiency of the food that was available, Christ commanded them to bring to Him what they had, which was comparatively nothing for that great multitude. Christ blessed and used what they gave to Him.

Christ bade the crowds to sit down in groups, took the loaves and the fishes which were presented to Him, thanked God for them, blessed them, brake them, and gave

them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the multitude and they all ate until they were filled. After the five thousand men, plus the thousands of women and children, had eaten to their complete satisfaction, Christ instructed the disciples to gather up the fragments that remain, and they filled twelve baskets.

Amazed and delighted on account of this wonderful miracle, the crowds were desirous of making Christ an earthly king. Perceiving their purpose, which was contrary to His mission of dying on the cross as an atonement for the sins of men, Christ sent His disciples and the multitude away. When he disbursed the people, He retired into the solitude of the mountains to pray.

Obedient to their Master's command, the disciples took their ship and put forth upon the calm sea. During the night the wind arose and lashed the waters into foam-crested waves. The sea was simply writhing like a man in agony. It is nothing unusual for Christian disciples to enter storms on the pathway of duty. With perfect vision Christ scans the pathways which all of His own must tread, and He foresees every danger and every test which lies in them. And He either plans or permits every experience for some wise purpose. Because one is on a rough path is not evidence that He is in the wrong one. Christ takes care of every emergency that arises in the line of obedience to His commands. His disciples did not go to sea of their own accord, but He told them to go. Therefore, it was a certainty that He would take care of them.

In the crowds that surrounded our Saviour, there were Pharisees, who were exceedingly proud men, and yet were lost. Christ cared for them; yea, He died for them. He spoke kindly to the ones who gave Him an opportunity. May God give us eyes to see people in their spiritual needs. Let us see others as Christ sees them. God grant that we may see our responsibilities. To prove that we must answer to God for them, the Bible says plainly, "So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). One day we shall be called before Him, and then we shall give an account for the way in which we have used our opportunities and responded to His calls. God grant that we may see people, and then rejoice to give them the message of the Saviour.

II. The Heart Of Christ - To Feel.

"Then Jesus called His disciples unto Him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way" (Matthew 15:32). Concerning that tremendous crowd that was following Christ and hearing His words, the Lord Jesus, in substance, said to His disciples, "I love them. I want to help them. They have been with me three days and have not had anything to eat. I cannot send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way." The disciples said, "Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to fill so great a multitude?" They took inventory. They found that they had seven loaves and "a few little fishes." Taking that food, Christ "commanded the multitude to sit on the ground." He gave thanks, and gave the food to His disciples, and the disciples handed it to the multitude. Four thousand men, plus the women and children, were filled and seven baskets full of food remained. Not only did Christ see the crowds, but He had compassion upon them.

Notice the location of the multitudes. Usually the multitudes are found on the lower levels of life. Christ "went up into the mountain apart to pray," but the multitude was down in the valley.

When Christ was transfigured, He had with Him Peter, James, and John. Moses and Elijah came and talked with Him regarding His death "which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." God the Father spoke and said, "This is my beloved Son: hear him." When all of this had taken place Christ and His three disciples came down from the mountain, and the multitudes met Him. The multitudes were in the valley. They live on the lower planes of life by themselves. They do not have any desire to scale the heights. It is only when Christ comes into the heart of an individual that that person has the desire to live the high and noble life, and to separate himself from the sinful crowds.

Notice the condition of the multitudes. When Christ looked on the crowds He saw that they were hungry, helpless, and lost. For them He had a great compassion of heart -- a fellow feeling for them in their destitution and personal needs.

Notice the expectation of the multitudes. When they came to Christ, they brought the sick, the afflicted, and the helpless. When He saw the people, Christ had compassion and healed their sick. Christ never disappoints those who are brought to Him. When we rest upon Him, He never disappoints, but when we look to ourselves, we fail. Depending upon others, we cannot win; but when we rest on the Saviour, all is well.

A man gave his testimony and told about a victory in his life. A victim of tuberculosis at the age of seventeen, he began to drink in the hope of easing his suffering. At twenty-five years of age, he was an alcoholic. When he became a Christian he quit drinking completely. Two years after he was saved, he told this story. He said: "I went to bed last night after reading the Bible and thanking God for victory during the day, and asking Him to take care of me through the night. I woke up past midnight, and the old urge to drink had returned. I got out of bed, dressed, and was in my car -- all against my will. I was driving fast. I was like a man who has a brain above a brain, a will above a will. But when I came to the crossroads, twenty miles from home, that would lead me into the hills where I used to buy liquor, suddenly I knew Someone was in the car with me -- Someone I could not see. He helped me to brake the car and turn it around. He helped me to drive the twenty miles back home. He gave me His blessing at the door of my home and was gone."

Thank God for the heart of Christ to understand and feel and have compassion upon His followers, and compassion for lost, unsaved people.

III. The Lips Of Christ - To Speak.

Christ spoke to command. "And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude" (Matthew 14:19). The voice of Christ is the voice of authority. Wise is the man who will heed the voice of the Saviour. Foolish is the man who refuses to hear and to heed that voice.

Friend, listen to His voice today. Even as I speak to you, the Son of God may be whispering in your ear. He is commanding you now to do a certain task. He may be calling you out of some wrong business or sinful conduct. He may want you to engage in soul-winning today. He may want you as a preacher, or as a missionary. He may

be laying upon your heart the fact that you ought to tithe. As certainly as He spoke to command when He was here in the flesh, He speaks to command us today.

Christ spoke to correct. Often He corrected His disciples. He spoke to the multitudes and gave them a word of correction, saying, "Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matthew 15:10-11). This word of correction was very displeasing to the Pharisees. They knew that He was talking to them. They were hypocrites, putting on a vain show, but in their hearts they were far from God.

Some Christians seem to resent the corrective words of our Saviour. People frequently come to see me and ask for advice about certain matters. When I open the Bible and read to them the command of God, they frequently refuse to abide by His Word of correction and direction.

Christ spoke to comfort. When His disciples were sailing on the sea, the ship was "tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him ..., They were troubled, saying, It is a spirit." But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer, it is I; be not afraid."

What an amazing number of truths come to us out of this incident. First, life has many troubles. The ship of life is often tossed with the waves. Christ comes to us, walking through the midst of our trials, and speaks to us, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

IV. The Power Of Christ -- To Save.

Consider the power of Christ to save a life. Christ came walking on the water, "and Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Jesus answered, "Come." Peter came down out of the ship and "walked on the water, to go to Jesus."

Let us not depreciate this act of Simon Peter. He did walk on the water. Suddenly "he saw the wind boisterous," and "he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." The hand of Christ was stretched out at once and it caught him. Christ saved Peter's life.

The Saviour is concerned about your life. He doesn't want you to waste it. He doesn't want you to waste a day. He wants you to spend every day with care. He wants you to pray for, expect, and receive divine guidance.

You may not be able to walk on the water, but your life can be greatly used of the Lord. When Simon Peter began to walk on the water, and then took his eyes off of Jesus Christ, he began to sink. The Lord rescued and saved him, and his life became a blessing to thousands, yea, to millions.

Your life can be a blessing to many also. You may not do the thing that you set out to do, but God has something better for you.

George Washington wanted to be a sailor in the king's navy. That was the dream and ambition of his early young manhood, and his trunks were even packed and his ticket bought to sail for England. But at the last his plans were frustrated, and he could not go. His disappointment was almost unbearable, but out of his disappointment came to him a far greater life.

Some time ago, there was a commemorative stamp in honor of mothers, and on the stamp was a portrait of Whistler's mother. Whistler was the greatest portrait-painter of his age, though as a young man he wanted to be a soldier. He went to West Point and flunked. He tried engineering and failed, and as a last resort he took up painting and became famous.

Sir Walter Scott gave to the world books which are among our most cherished classics. His fondest ambition was to be a poet. He tried poetry and failed miserably. He was so ashamed of his first novels that he published them anonymously, but out of this came fame and world renown.

Remember that Christ has power to provide for His own. On the occasion mentioned in our lesson there was certainly a great scarcity. There was not any food for the multitudes. It seemed ridiculous to place the lunch of one little boy before such a crowd, and the disciples might be excused for muttering, "What are five loaves and two fishes among so many?" But we notice that there was a great Saviour. He took the loaves and fishes and blessed them and broke them and gave them to the thousands, and there was a great and complete satisfaction. Everyone was filled, and there was plenty of food left.

Consider Christ's power to save a soul. It mattered not whether the one coming to Christ was a leper, a lame man, a deaf man, a blind man, or a Pharisee, He could and did save everyone who came to Him. Christ can bring salvation to multitudes, or to individuals. Salvation is a personal transaction. We are not born again in great numbers, but we are born from above individually. Repent of your sin, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive eternal life through Him. Christ said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47).