

# SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

THE PARISH CHURCH OF GLASBURY,  
BRECKNOCKSHIRE,

AND

ST. JAMES'S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM,  
SURREY.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES BRADLEY,  
VICAR OF GLASBURY.

A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO., AND T. HATCHARD.

1854.

# SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

ST. JAMES'S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM,  
SURREY.

*The Seventh Edition.*

## SERMON II.

---

### THE MULTITUDE FED IN THE WILDERNESS.

ST. MARK VI. 42.—“And they did all eat and were filled.”

IT is a remarkable fact, that of the many miracles wrought by our Lord, this is the only one recorded by all the evangelists. The inference we are to draw is plain—it is a miracle of peculiar importance. It was deemed such evidently by those who witnessed it; it is stamped as such by that Holy Spirit who has thus written it again and again in the book he has inspired.

And there is no difficulty in perceiving wherein its importance lies. We shall undoubtedly find it in the development it affords us of the Saviour's character; in the discovery it makes of his goodness and greatness; in the force with which it tells a needy world, that he is able and willing to supply all its wants, and to supply them to the greatest possible degree, under all circumstances, at all times. We must view it then in this light; that is, we must look on it as a striking though partial exhibition of the Lord Jesus Christ, his excellencies and his ways. And may he himself open our minds to receive the knowledge of him it is calculated to impart!

Our attention must necessarily be confined to a part only of the history. Let us select these four points—the miracle itself; the feelings with which our Lord seems to have wrought it; the time when it was performed; and the place where it occurred.

I. *The miracle* was the feeding of a large multitude of men with food sufficient for a small number only, and leaving among them, after every one was satisfied, a larger quantity of provision than was found in the place at first.

1. Now the first thing that strikes us here, is *power*, power over the material world.

And this to material beings like ourselves, is a concern of no small moment. We are surrounded with material things. We live among them and upon them. Our comfort, our safety, nay, our very existence, are made dependent on them. With the body they can do what they will; and through the body they can get at the soul, and affect it deeply; send it out of the body, naked and lonely, to its everlasting home.

In such a situation, the mind, when the mind thinks on the subject, naturally asks, Have the things around us any master or ruler? and if so, who is he? “The Lord Christ,” answers the gospel. It exhibits him to us as the

Monarch of the world he has formed; with all its parts under his control, and every element in it at his command. On this occasion, food, in simply passing from hand to hand, is multiplied at his bidding, so that five thousand eat and are filled from a meal sufficient in appearance for five only. And this is no solitary instance of the obedience of matter to him. He treads on the sea, and it sustains his weight; he speaks to the winds, and in a moment the hurricane sinks down into a calm.

It follows then, brethren, that when we make light of Jesus of Nazareth, we are making light of one who can never be at a loss for an instrument to punish or destroy us; one who can arm all nature against us; send the lightnings of heaven to blast, or give a feeble moth power to crush us.

It follows also, that the stores of nature are to us just what he is pleased to make them; that food, and air, and medicine, do his work and nothing more.

And does not this blessed truth also follow, that in the material, as well as in the spiritual world, his people are safe? They may suffer perils to alarm and difficulties to oppress them, but they need fear no evil. He who is watching over them, has boundless resources at his command, ten thousand unthought of ways of removing danger and supplying want. "The silver and the gold are his," and so "are the cattle on a thousand hills." Yea, "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." He has proved himself its Master. At his nod the sea has divided to give deliverance to his people; a flinty rock has poured out water to minister to their comfort; and when they have wanted food, he has rained it down upon them from the clouds. There may be in our houses only a barrel of meal and a cruse of oil; but what then? "We shall not want." He who has given us but that little, will make that little enough, and make us wonder that it is enough, "filling our hearts with food and gladness."

2. Notice also in this miracle *the little value which Christ puts on sensual gratifications*, on luxuries and what we call comforts.

We have seen his power; it was evidently boundless. A word from his lips could have spread before this multitude all the delicacies of the east. But in calling his omnipotence into exercise for them, the only food he provides is the mean fare of the humblest fisherman. Their souls he had just before been feeding with the bread of life; nothing he deems too good for them; he was willing to give the food of angels for their support, nay, himself; but when their bodies are to be fed, any sustenance that is at hand, contents him. A few barley loaves will answer that mean purpose, as well as the most sumptuous fare. He will have no waste; he says even of these plain provisions, "Gather up the fragments;" he sets some value on every thing he gives or creates; but as to the value he sets on that which pampers the appetite, it is so trifling that we cannot discover it.

On another occasion we see him acting in precisely the same manner. He provides food for Elijah, the greatest and best man of his age; and sends a messenger from heaven to carry it to him; and what is it? It comes to a prophet from an angel's hand; and yet it is only a cake of bread and a cruse of water.

How instructive is all this to the poor and straitened! How forcibly does it say to you, "Be content with such things as ye have!" You may fare hard, but there is not one of you who does not fare as well as the Lord of nature fared in the days of his flesh; and yet he ate his mean food with thankfulness, and would never put forth his power to make it better.

And how strongly does this simple meal condemn others of us! It says nothing, brethren, against taking and enjoying what God has given; his gifts are sent us to be enjoyed; but the caring about the things of the body, the eager indulgence in them, the thought and time they occupy, that restlessness and discontent which we experience when, owing to any accident, we cannot get them—what is all this? It is folly. It is worse; it is sin. It is more than sin; it is an indication of a bad state of heart; a proof that there is little, if any thing spiritual within us; that the mind is still in its native earthliness; that it knows nothing whatever of a new and heaven-born life. Put the grace of God into the heart, implant there the love of Christ, let the soul once taste the sweets of his presence, let it but catch for one moment the joy that he can bestow; and we shall care but little about what we eat, or what we drink, or what we put on. Christ in the heart will drive all such care out of the heart; will assuredly bring content into the heart. And there is no way of getting content into it without Christ. Purple and fine linen will not do it; no, nor faring sumptuously every day. Discontent can reign over a mansion or a palace as tormentingly as in a cottage; nay, it sits down at a well-spread table far oftener than at a frugal board. It feels most at home amidst luxury and pomp. Our old writers often say, and say it with as much truth as point, "Nature is content with little, grace with less, sin with nothing."

II. Let us pass on now to *the feelings with which this miracle was wrought*.

1. One of these was evidently *a consciousness of power*.

Not that it was wrought ostentatiously, for the purpose of exciting astonishment or applause; it was a work of pure compassion, with no vain show whatever in it; nay, with a concealment of power, rather than a display of it. But who can read this history and not see that the Being who wrought this wonder, knew himself able to work any wonder? that he felt his omnipotence? Look at the scene.

"Send the multitude away that they may get food," said the disciples. "They need not depart," said the lofty Saviour. Their words sounded to him

like an impeachment of his all-sufficiency, and conscious greatness prompts his answer. "A starving multitude sent away from me for bread! Why, all the bread on earth or in heaven is mine. Were famished worlds before me, they need not depart. Make the men sit down." And this, observe, was said before the food was multiplied; said by one in a human form, with only five loaves and two small fishes before him, in the presence of more than five thousand men; and said with a composure and confidence, that indicated a certainty in his own mind as to his ability to provide the food desired. Or rather perhaps we ought to say, the Saviour's whole demeanour in this transaction indicates an absence of all thought about his own power. It manifests such a habit of doing wonders, of bringing to pass whatever his wisdom and his compassion dictate, that he does not give his own ability a place in his mind. He thinks no more of it, than we think of our power to open our lips when we speak, or to step when we walk. And thus comes out the hidden Godhead. It is seen in the miracles he performed, the wonders he accomplished, and seen in them clearly and gloriously; but it is more visible still perhaps in the manner in which he wrought these wonders, in the quietness, the ease, the dignity, the conscious greatness, with which they were accompanied.

2. We have thus looked at the author of this miracle as God; but he is as really man as he is God, and he feels and acts here like a dependent man; for mark further *the spirit of devotion* he manifests.

"When he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes," the evangelist says, "he looked up to heaven and blessed." And he did this, not merely to teach the multitude around him to acknowledge God in the bounties of his providence and to praise him for them, but from a real feeling of dependence at work in his own mind, from the overflowings of gratitude towards his Father in his own breast.

It seems too that this was only in conformity with his usual practice. Look at that blessed meal he ate at Emmaus after his resurrection. There was nothing peculiar in that. It was not a miraculous meal like this wonderful provision before us; nor was it a sacramental feast like his last supper at Jerusalem; it was an ordinary repast taken in an ordinary manner. And yet we read that "as he sat at meat with his two disciples, he took bread and blessed it;" and the action discovered him; "their eyes were opened" by it, "and they knew him;"—a clear proof that his expressions of thankfulness for his daily food were not reserved for special occasions, that they were more than the decent formalities observed by his countrymen, that they were so constant and so fervent as to characterize him. His heart-warming discourse did not betray him. The disciples themselves say "that he was known of them in breaking of bread."

And why all this? Why this bringing of devotion to bear upon the trifles of life? Because God is in all these trifles; because we have not a single

enjoyment or comfort which he does not give us; because moreover we are commanded to acknowledge him and glorify him in every thing. "Whether ye eat or drink," says the Holy Spirit, "or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Besides, where there is real devotion in the heart, it will appear, and appear habitually, in the life. There is no confining of it to the church or the closet; it is within the man, and wherever the man goes, his religion will go with him. It is become a part of himself; no longer what it was once, a garment to be put on at one time and thrown off at another, but as inseparable from him as his form or his life.

True religion, brethren, is not an act, but a habit; not an impulse or emotion, but a principle; not a sudden torrent, produced by the snows of winter or the thunder-storm of summer, it is a stream ever running, varying indeed in its breadth and depth, but from the moment of its rise, ever flowing on till it reaches the ocean of everlasting life. Banish God from your meals, or habitually from any thing, and you might as well banish him from every thing. Your religion is a notion or a form, and will prove in the end a delusion.

3. Notice also *the munificence*, the liberality, with which our Lord spreads this wide board for this vast multitude.

"The two fishes divided he among them all; and they did all eat and were filled." None were excluded, none were controlled, none went away dissatisfied. There was enough and to spare. And had the number of these five thousand men been multiplied a thousand fold, it would have been the same; the evangelist would still have told us with the same simplicity and truth, "they did all eat and were filled."

And think not, brethren, that you can ever exhaust the grace, or diminish the fulness, of your almighty Saviour. You may come to him for the pardon in one moment of the sins of a whole life, and these sins may be as many in number as the moments you have breathed, and as dark in their character as the desperate wickedness of your own vile hearts, it matters not; "with him is plenteous redemption;" "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin;" "he will abundantly pardon." And if you come to him again, he will pardon again; he will "multiply pardons." And did you come with a throng of sinners more numerous than the sands of the sea-shore, and all as deeply laden with iniquities as yourselves, you would be pardoned as soon and pardoned as freely; and when you looked around on that guilty multitude, not one unpardoned transgressor would you find among them all; no, nor an unpardoned sin. And when you turned your wondering eyes again on your merciful Lord, you would see him waiting still to be gracious, his love would be as overflowing as before, his forgiveness as ready and as free, his power as vast, his invitations as extensive, his pleadings as earnest, his heaven as open.

And if you come to him for any other mercy, yea, for all the mercies that a creature finite like you can receive or an infinite God can give, you may have them all, and in an abundance that you can no more measure than you can span the universe. “He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” “He is a God full of compassion and gracious.” As he spreads his table in the wilderness, this is his call to a world of sinners, “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” And this is his promise to his Zion, “I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread.”

III. *The time chosen for this miracle* calls now for our notice.

The thirty-fifth verse says that it was wrought in the evening, “when the day was now far passed;” when the disciples began to be concerned for the safety, or, at all events, for the comfort, of the people. And not only so, the loaves were not multiplied till these disciples had been taught that they could do nothing for the hungry crowd. “They have nothing to eat,” said they. “Give ye them to eat,” answered Christ; thus reminding them of their utter inability to help themselves or others. And that this delay was the effect of design, not of accident, may fairly be inferred from the still longer delay which took place before the performing of a similar miracle on a similar occasion. Then Christ began first. “In those days,” we read in the eighth chapter of this gospel, “the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way.” And why this delay? Why not have fed these multitudes earlier? Why keep them till they were thus spent? For their spiritual benefit, for our soul’s good; to show us this—our Lord’s determination to make his creatures feel their wants before he supplies them; to bring out our weakness and lay it bare, before he manifests in us his strength.

This mode of proceeding runs through all his dealings with us, whether in providence or in grace. He humbles us “under his mighty hand,” before he exalts us; he breaks our hearts, before he heals them; he causes us to groan under the burden of our guilt, before he removes it; he never conquers our lusts for us, before he has taught us to discover and hate them. Nay, anxiously as he desires our holiness, it is not till we are brought to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” more than for any thing else, that we are filled. And when has he given us strength, and consolation, and joy, those pleasures which have almost turned the earth into a heaven? It has been when we have found out that there are no pleasures any where else; when we have felt ourselves poor, and our friends poor, and the world poor, and the whole

universe poor; when our hearts have been fainting with sorrow, and well nigh bursting with wretchedness. It is a blessed thing for God to empty the soul; a blessed thing to have self-righteousness, and self-dependence, and all earthly confidence, beaten down. It is a sure forerunner of mercy, and of mercy such as this—great mercy, striking mercy, mercy that makes us wonder as we receive it, mercy that satisfies, mercy that is like this miraculous bread—as we eat of it we are filled.

IV. And this is nearly the same truth that our fourth subject will suggest to us—*the place where this miracle was performed.*

The scene of it, we are told, was a desert, a barren shore of the lake of Galilee; a place unproductive of provisions, and remote from any visible means of supply; the last place, in fact, in which these men expected to eat and be filled. And more than this—it was a desert wherein the Saviour had led them; at least, they would not have been found there had he not gone there before them. They followed him thither.

You discover then at once, brethren, the lesson we have to learn here—our richest supplies, our best comforts, are not the growth of our worldly prosperity, nor often the companions of our worldly ease; they come to us in situations and under circumstances, which seem to cut us off from every comfort and supply. We receive them in affliction, and never so abundantly as in those deep afflictions, those extremities of suffering or trouble, into which our Master himself has the most visibly led us. And not only so, they often seem to grow out of our afflictions. We are fed in the desert, and by food which is created in the desert, and which, as far as we can see, we should never have had put into our hands had we not been in the desert. This miracle seems like a practical commentary on that strange but gracious promise of the Lord to the Jewish church; “Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence;” “her vines shall spring up where nothing ever grew before but briars and thorns.”

And what have your own lives been, Christian brethren? They have all been in harmony with this miracle and this promise. Think of the deserts in which you have wandered.

Outward affliction has been one of these. You have been in it, and dark indeed were your fears as you entered it; and yet did your souls starve? Did you sink down exhausted in that wilderness? “Your foot had well nigh slipped,” for a time you almost fainted; but the supply came at last, and turned that scene of desolation into a fruitful land. O what vineyards have you had from thence! what refreshments have been sent you there from on high! what support, and love, and tenderness, have you experienced! Often when an object of compassion perhaps to earthly friends, you have been singing aloud with happiness.

Spiritual sorrow too, conviction of sin, is another wilderness; a dark and fearful one; none on earth more fearful. Who does not remember the wonder, and confusion, and terror, of that hour, when God first made him feel he had a guilty soul? But what did you ultimately get out of that land of darkness? What came out of all those fears and alarms? A discovery of redeeming love, an insight into the virtue and glory of the Saviour's cross, a peace, a hope, a joy in believing, which have done for you, what? not reconciled you to your guilt;—God forbid!—but which have caused you to deem the discovery vouchsafed you of that guilt the greatest blessing of your life. If there is one thing for which you are thankful, it is this, that you have trembled under the burden of sin and wept under a sense of your pollution.

O never let us fear the desert, as long as we are there with the Lord Jesus Christ. A thousand times over has he furnished for his people a table in the wilderness, and never on this side heaven, will they be any where else so well supplied. In other spots, there is often hunger amidst seeming plenteousness; our souls have felt it, and been well nigh famished; but look through the whole church, look at that great multitude who have shared its sorrows—we may say of them all, when Christ has allured them and led them into the wilderness, “they did all eat and were filled.”

And here I must end, not however without suggesting to you this one reflection—*How glorious a Being is the Lord Jesus Christ!*

Look once more at the scene this scripture presents. One man standing amidst a multitude of five thousand men, and satisfying them all with his single hand; and that not from any supplies previously collected, but creating food as he distributes it, and creating and distributing it as long as any one will take it, and doing all this without an effort or a boast, with thankfulness and prayer;—there is indeed greatness in this spectacle, a silent but mighty greatness, that no royal banquet, that no external pomp, that no earthly pageant, ever yet displayed. But after all, to what does it amount? The Lord Christ feeding for an hour one company with the bread that perishes! Why, brethren, he has been feeding for ages the whole multitude of heaven with imperishable joys; and the time is fast coming on when around him will be assembled, not five thousand, but ten thousand times ten thousand of his saints; all the spirits in all the worlds that he has redeemed or upheld; all filled and overflowing with happiness, and not a thrill, not an emotion of happiness to be found among them, which has not him for its Creator and Giver.

O the glory of that Being who is the sinner's refuge and hope! What an amazing power to bless is hidden in him! What an inexhaustible, infinite fulness! To be fainting with want, to be starving and perishing, while such a Being says, “I am the bread of life”—if you have never wondered before, go away and deem yourselves now the greatest wonders in the world. A happy,

redeemed sinner in heaven makes all heaven marvel; but a sinner starving on the earth, with such a Saviour near him as Jesus Christ; a man destitute of the food his soul needs in a Christian country and in a Christian church, with the tidings of the gospel sounding in his ears, and the blessings of the gospel waiting his acceptance—there is no wonder greater than this, none half so awful. And yet some of us must say, “That wonder am I. That creature starving in the midst of plenty; carrying about an empty soul without a wish to have it filled; never once asking mercy for it, and trampling every moment on the food that would save and gladden it;—that wonder am I.” And what will be the end of this mysterious folly? Prayer or ruin; conversion or death; an awakened, renewed, supplicating, abased soul here, or a starved soul, a lost soul, for ever.