

SHORT
EXPOSITORY READINGS
ON THE
GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

A SELECTION DESIGNED FOR
Family Reading, Mothers' Meetings, and
District Visitors.

BY THE
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XXIV.

CHRIST FEEDING THE MULTITUDE.

JOHN VI. 1–14.

“After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias.

“And a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased.

“And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.

“And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

“When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?

“And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do.

“Philip answered Him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

“One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto Him,

“There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

“And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

“And Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were sat down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

“When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

“Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

“Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.”

WE have, for one thing, in this miracle, *a lesson about Christ’s almighty power.* We see our Lord feeding five thousand men with “five barley loaves and two small fishes.” We see clear proof that a miraculous event took place in the “twelve baskets of fragments” that remained after all had eaten. Creative power was manifestly exercised. Food was called into existence that did not exist before. In healing the sick, and raising the dead, something was amended or restored that had already existed. In feeding five thousand men with five loaves, something must have been created which before had no existence.

Such a history as this ought to be specially instructive and encouraging to all who endeavour to do good to souls. It shows us the Lord Jesus, “able to save to the uttermost” He is one who has all power over dead hearts. Not only can He mend that which is broken,—build up that which is ruined,—heal that which is sick,—strengthen that which is weak, He can do even greater things than these. He can call into being that which was not before, and call it out of nothing. We must never despair of any one being saved. So long as there is life there is hope. Reason and sense may say that some poor sinner is too hardened, or too old to be converted. Faith will reply, “Our Master can create as well as renew. With a Saviour who, by His Spirit, can create a new heart, nothing is impossible.”

We have, for another thing, in this miracle, *a lesson about the office of ministers*. We see the apostles receiving the bread from our Lord’s hands, after He had blessed it, and distributing it to the multitude. It was not their hands that made it increase and multiply, but their Master’s. It was His almighty power that provided an unfailing supply. It was their work to receive humbly, and distribute faithfully.

Now here is a lively emblem of the work which a true minister of the New Testament is meant to do. He is not a mediator between God and man. He has no power to put away sin, or impart grace. His whole business is to receive the bread of life which his Master provides, and

to distribute it among the souls among whom he labours. He cannot make men value the bread, or receive it. He cannot make it soul-saving, or life-giving, to any one. This is not his work. For this he is not responsible. His whole business is to be a faithful distributor of the food which his Divine Master has provided; and that done, his office is discharged.

We have, lastly, in this miracle, a *lesson about the sufficiency of the Gospel for the wants of all mankind*. We see the Lord Jesus supplying the hunger of a huge multitude of five thousand men. The provision seemed, at first sight, utterly inadequate for the occasion. To satisfy so many craving mouths with such scanty fare, in such a wilderness, seemed impossible. But the event showed that there was enough and to spare. There was not one who could complain that he was not filled.

There can be no doubt that this was meant to teach the adequacy of Christ's Gospel to supply the necessities of the whole world. Weak, and feeble, and foolish as it may seem to man, the simple story of the cross is enough for all the children of Adam in every part of the globe. The tidings of Christ's death for sinners, and the atonement made by that death, is able to meet the hearts and satisfy the consciences of all nations, and peoples, and kindreds, and tongues. Carried by faithful messengers, it feeds and supplies all ranks and classes. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us who are saved it is the power of

God.” (1 Cor. i. 18.) Five barley loaves and two small fishes seemed scanty provision for a hungry crowd. But blessed by Christ, and distributed by His disciples, they were more than sufficient.

XXV.

CHRIST WALKING UPON THE WATER.

JOHN VI. 15–21.

“When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone.

“And when even was now come, His disciples went down unto the sea.

“And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.

“And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.

“So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.

“But He saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.

“Then they willingly received Him into the ship; and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.”

WE should notice, in these verses, *the trials through which Christ's disciples had to pass*. We are told that they were sent over the lake by themselves, while their Master tarried behind. And then we see them alone in a dark night, tossed about by a great wind on stormy waters, and, worst of all, Christ not with them. It was a

strange transition. From witnessing a mighty miracle, and helping it instrumentally, amidst an admiring crowd, to solitude, darkness, winds, waves, storm, anxiety, and danger, the change was very great! But Christ knew it, and Christ appointed it, and it was working for their good.

Trial, we must distinctly understand, is part of the diet which all true Christians must expect. It is one of the means by which their grace is proved, and by which they find out what there is in themselves. Winter as well as summer, cold as well as heat, clouds as well as sunshine,—are all necessary to bring the fruit of the Spirit to ripeness and maturity. We do not naturally like this. We would rather cross the lake with calm weather and favourable winds, with Christ always by our side, and the sun shining down on our faces. But it may not be. It is not in this way that God's children are made "partakers of His holiness." (Heb. xii. 10.) Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, and Job were all men of many trials. Let us be content to walk in their footsteps, and to drink of their cup. In our darkest hours we may seem to be left,—but we are never really alone.

Let us notice, also, *our Lord Jesus Christ's power over the waves of the sea*. He came to His disciples as they were rowing on the stormy lake, "walking on" the waters. He walked on them as easily as we walk on dry land. They bore Him as firmly as the pavement of the Temple, or the hills around Nazareth. That which is

contrary to all natural reason was perfectly possible to Christ.

The Lord Jesus, we must remember, is not only the Lord, but the Maker of all creation. "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." (John i. 3.) It was just as easy for Him to walk on the sea as to form the sea at the beginning,—just as easy to suspend the common laws of nature, as they are called, as to impose those laws at the first. Learned men talk solemn nonsense sometimes about the eternal fixity of the "laws of nature," as if they were above God Himself and could never be suspended. It is well to be reminded sometimes by such miracles as that before us, that these so-called "laws of nature" are neither immutable nor eternal. They had a beginning, and will one day have an end.

Let all true Christians take comfort in the thought that their Saviour is Lord of waves and winds, of storms and tempests, and can come to them in the darkest hour, "walking upon the sea." There are waves of trouble far heavier than any on the Lake of Galilee. There are days of darkness which try the faith of the holiest Christian. But let us never despair if Christ is our Friend. He can come to our aid in an hour when we think not, and in ways that we did not expect. And when He comes, all will be calm.

XXVI.

ONE THING NEEDFUL.

JOHN VI. 22–27.

“The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples were gone away alone:

“(Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:)

“When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither His disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.

“And when they had found Him on the other side of the sea, they said unto Him, Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?

“Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed.”

WE should mark, in this passage, *what Christ forbids*. He told the crowds who followed Him so diligently for the loaves and fishes, “not to labour for the meat that perisheth.” It was a remarkable saying, and demands explanation.

Our Lord, we may be sure, did not mean to encourage idleness. It would be a great mistake to suppose this. Labour was the appointed lot of Adam in Paradise. Labour was ordained to be man’s occupation after the fall. Labour is honourable in all men. No one need be ashamed of belonging to “the working classes.” Our Lord Himself worked in the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth. St. Paul wrought as a tent-maker with his own hands.

What our Lord did mean to rebuke was that excessive attention to labour for the body, while the soul is neglected, which prevails everywhere in the world. What He reproved was the common habit of labouring only for the things of time, and letting alone the things of eternity,—of minding only the life that now is, and disregarding the life to come. Against this habit He delivers a solemn warning.

Happy are those who learn betimes the respective value of soul and body, and give the first and best place in their thoughts to salvation. One thing is needful. He that seeks first the kingdom of God will never fail to find “all other things added to him.” (Matt. vi. 33.)

We should mark, in this passage, *what Christ advises*. He tells us to “labour for the meat that endureth to everlasting life.” He would have us take pains to find food and satisfaction for our souls. That food is provided in rich abundance in Him. But he that would have it must diligently seek it.

How are we to labour? There is but one answer. We must labour in the use of all appointed means. We must read our Bibles, like men digging for hidden treasure. We must wrestle earnestly in prayer, like men contending with a deadly enemy for life. We must take our whole heart to the house of God, and worship and hear like those who listen to the reading of a will. We must fight daily against sin, the world, and the devil, like those who fight for liberty, and must conquer or be slaves. These are the ways we must walk in if we would find Christ, and be found of Him. This is “labouring.” This is the secret of getting on about our souls.

Labour like this no doubt is very uncommon. In carrying it on we shall have little encouragement from man, and shall often be told that we are “extreme,” and go too far. Strange and absurd as it is, the natural man is always fancying that we may take too much thought about religion, and refusing to see that we are far more likely to take too much thought about the world. But whatever man may say, the soul will never get spiritual food without labour. We must “strive,” we must “run,” we must “fight,” we must throw our whole heart into our

soul's affairs. "It is the violent" who take the kingdom. (Matt. xi. 12.)

We should mark, lastly, in this passage, *what a promise Christ holds out*. He tells us that He Himself will give eternal food to all who seek it: "the Son of man shall give you the meat that endureth unto everlasting life."

How gracious and encouraging these words are! Whatever we need for the relief of our hungering souls, Christ is ready and willing to bestow. Whatever mercy, grace, peace, strength we require, the Son of man will give freely, immediately, abundantly, and eternally. He is "sealed," and appointed, and commissioned by God the Father for this very purpose. Like Joseph in the Egyptian famine, it is His office to be the Friend, and Almoner, and Reliever of a sinful world. He is far more willing to give than man is to receive. The more sinners apply to Him, the better He is pleased.

And now, as we leave this rich passage, let us ask ourselves what use we make of it? For what are we labouring ourselves? What do we know of lasting food and satisfaction for our inward man? Never let us rest till we have eaten of the meat which Christ alone can give. They that are content with any other spiritual food will sooner or later "lie down in sorrow." (Isa. 1. 11.)

XXVII.

SAVING FAITH.

JOHN VI. 28–34.

“Then said they unto Him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?”

“Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent,

“They said therefore unto Him, What sign showest Thou then, that we may see, and believe Thee? what dost Thou work?”

“Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat,

“Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven,

“For the bread of God is He that cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world,

“Then saith they unto Him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.”

WE should observe, for one thing, in these verses, *the spiritual ignorance and unbelief of the natural man*, Twice over we see this brought out and exemplified. When our Lord bade His hearers “labour for the meat which endureth to eternal life,” they immediately began to think of works to be done, and a goodness of their

own to be established. "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Doing, doing, doing, was their only idea of the way to heaven.—Again, when our Lord spoke of Himself as One sent of God, and the need of believing on Him at once, they turn round with the question, "What sign showest Thou? what dost Thou work?" Fresh from the mighty miracle of the loaves and fishes, one might have thought they had had a sign sufficient to convince them. Taught by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, one might have expected a greater readiness to believe. But alas! there are no limits to man's dullness, prejudice, and unbelief in spiritual matters. It is a striking fact that the only thing which our Lord is said to have " marvelled " at during His earthly ministry, was man's " unbelief " (Mark vi. 6.)

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, *the high honour Christ puts on faith in Himself*. The Jews had asked Him, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" In reply He says, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." A truly striking and remarkable expression! If any two things are put in strong contrast in the New Testament, they are faith and works. Not working, but believing,—not of works, but through faith,—are words familiar to all careful Bible-readers. Yet here the great Head of the Church declares that believing on Him is the highest and greatest of all "works!" It is "the work of God."

Doubtless our Lord did not mean that there is anything meritorious in believing. Man's faith at the very best, is feeble and defective. Regarded as a "work," it cannot stand the severity of God's judgment, deserve pardon, or purchase heaven. But our Lord did mean that faith in Himself, as the only Saviour, is the first act of the soul which God requires at a sinner's hands. Till a man believes on Jesus, and rests on Jesus as a lost sinner, he is nothing.—Our Lord did mean that faith in Himself is that act of the soul which specially pleases God. When the Father sees a sinner casting aside his own righteousness, and simply trusting in His dear Son, He is well pleased. Without such faith it is impossible to please God. Our Lord did mean that faith in Himself is the root of all saving religion. There is no life in a man till he believes.—Above all, our Lord did mean that faith in Himself is the hardest of all spiritual acts to the natural man. Did the Jews want something to do in religion? Let them know that the greatest thing they had to do was to cast aside their pride, confess their guilt and need, and humbly believe.

Let all who know anything of true faith thank God and rejoice. Blessed are they that believe! It is an attainment which many of the wise of this world have never yet reached. We may feel ourselves poor, weak sinners. But do we believe?—We may fail and come short in many things. But do we believe?—He that has learned to feel his sins, and to trust Christ as a Saviour,

has learned the two hardest and greatest lessons in Christianity. He has been in the best of schools. He has been taught by the Holy Ghost.

XXVIII.

THE BREAD OF LIFE.

JOHN VI. 35–40.

“And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst,

“But I said unto you, That ye also have seen Me, and believe not,

“All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out,

“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me,

“And this is My Father’s will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day,

“And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

WE have, first, in these verses, a *saying of Christ about Himself*. We read that Jesus said, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.”

Our Lord would have us know that He Himself is the appointed food of man’s soul. The soul of every man is

naturally starving and famishing through sin. Christ is given by God the Father, to be the Satisfier, the Reliever, and the Physician of man's spiritual need. In Him and His mediatorial office—in Him and His atoning death,—in Him and His priesthood,—in Him and His grace, love, and power,—in Him alone will empty souls find their wants supplied. In Him there is life. He is “the bread of life.”

With what Divine and perfect wisdom this name is chosen! Bread is necessary food. We can manage tolerably well without many things on our table, but not without bread. So it is with Christ. We must have Christ, or die in our own sins. Bread is food that suits all. Some cannot eat meat, and some cannot eat vegetables. But all like bread. It is food both for the Queen and the pauper. So it is with Christ. He is just the Saviour that meets the wants of every class.—Bread is food that we need daily. Other kinds of food we take, perhaps, only occasionally. But we want bread every morning and evening in our lives. So it is with Christ. There is no day in our lives but we need His blood, His righteousness, His intercession, and His grace.—Well may He be called, “the Bread of life!”

We have, secondly, in these verses, *a saying of Christ about those who come to Him*. We read that Jesus said, “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.”

What does “coming” mean? It means that movement of the soul which takes place when a man, feeling his

sins, and finding out that he cannot save himself, hears of Christ, applies to Christ, trusts in Christ, lays hold on Christ, and leans all his weight on Christ for salvation. When this happens a man is said, in Scripture language, to “come” to Christ.

What did our Lord mean by saying, “I will in nowise cast him out”? He meant that He will not refuse to save any one who comes to Him, no matter what he may have been. His past sins may have been very great. His present weakness and infirmity may be very great. But does he come to Christ by faith? Then Christ will receive him graciously, pardon him freely, place him in the number of His dear children, and give him everlasting life.

We have, lastly, in these verses, *a saying of Christ about the will of His Father*. Twice over come the solemn words, “This is the will of Him that sent Me.” Once we are told it is His will, “that every one that seeth the Son may have everlasting life.” Once we are told it is His will that, “of all which He hath given to Christ He shall lose nothing.”

We are taught by these words that Christ has brought into the world a salvation open and free to every one. Our Lord draws a picture of it from the story of the brazen serpent, by which bitten Israelites in the wilderness were healed. Every one that chose to “look” at the brazen serpent might live. Just in the same way every one who desires eternal life may “look” at Christ

by faith, and have it freely. There is no barrier, no limit, no restriction. The terms of the Gospel are wide and simple. Every one may “look and live.”

We are taught, furthermore, that Christ will never allow any soul that is committed to Him to be lost and cast away. He will keep it safe, from grace to glory, in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Not one bone of His mystical body shall ever be broken. Not one lamb of His flock shall ever be left behind in the wilderness. He will raise to glory, in the last day, the whole flock entrusted to his charge, and not one shall be found missing.

Let the true Christian feed on the truths contained in this passage, and thank God for them. Christ the Bread of life,—Christ the Receiver of all who come to Him,—Christ the Preserver of all believers,—Christ is for every man who is willing to believe on Him, and Christ is the eternal possession of all who so believe. Surely this is glad tidings and good news!

XXIX.

FEEDING UPON CHRIST.

JOHN VI. 52–59.

*“The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying,
How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”*

*“Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto
you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink
His blood, ye have no life in you.*

*“Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath
eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

*“For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink
indeed.*

*“He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood,
dwelleth in Me, and I in him.*

*“As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the
Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.*

*“This is that bread which came down from heaven: not
as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that
eateth of this bread shall live for ever.*

*“These things said He in the synagogue, as He taught
in Capernaum.”*

LET US first consider carefully, *what these verses do not mean*. The “eating and drinking” of which Christ speaks do not mean any literal eating and drinking. Above all, the words were not spoken with any reference to the

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We may eat the Lord's Supper, and yet not eat and drink Christ's body and blood. We may eat and drink Christ's body and blood, and yet not eat the Lord's Supper. Let this never be forgotten.

Let us next consider carefully, *what these verses do mean*. The expressions they contain are, no doubt, very remarkable. Let us try to get some clear notion of their meaning.

The "flesh and blood of the Son of man" mean that sacrifice of His own body which Christ offered up on the cross when He died for sinners. The atonement made by His death, the satisfaction made by His sufferings, as our Substitute, the redemption effected by His enduring the penalty of our sins in His own body on the tree,—this seems to be the true idea that we should set before our minds.

The "eating and drinking," without which there is no life in us, means that reception of Christ's sacrifice which takes place when a man believes on Christ crucified for salvation. It is an inward and spiritual act of the heart, and has nothing to do with the body. Whenever a man, feeling his own guilt and sinfulness, lays hold on Christ, and trusts in the atonement made for him by Christ's death, at once he "eats the flesh of the Son of man, and drinks His blood." His soul feeds on Christ's sacrifice, by faith, just as his body would feed on bread. Believing, he is said to "eat." Believing, he is said to

“drink.” And the special thing that he eats, and drinks, and gets benefit from, is the atonement made for his sins by Christ’s death for him on Calvary.

The practical lessons which may be gathered from the whole passage are weighty and important. The point being once settled, that “the flesh and blood” in these verses mean Christ’s atonement, and the “eating and drinking” mean faith, we may find in these verses great principles of truth, which lie at the very root of Christianity.

We may learn that faith in Christ’s atonement is a thing of absolute necessity to salvation. Just as there was no safety for the Israelite in Egypt who did not eat the passover-lamb in the night when the first-born were slain, so there is no life for the sinner who does not eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood.

We may learn that faith in Christ’s atonement unites us by the closest possible bonds to our Saviour, and entitles us to the highest privileges. Our souls shall find full satisfaction for all their wants: “His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood is drink indeed.” All things are secured to us that we can need for time and eternity: “Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Last, but not least, we may learn that faith in Christ’s atonement is a personal act, a daily act, and an act that can be felt. No one can eat and drink for us, and no one, in like manner, can believe for us.—We need food every

day, and not once a week or once a month; and in like manner, we need to employ faith every day.—We feel benefit when we have eaten and drunk, we feel strengthened, nourished, and refreshed; and, in like manner, if we believe truly, we shall feel the better for it, by sensible hope and peace in our inward man.

Let us take heed that we use these truths, as well as know them. The food of this world, for which so many take thought, will perish in the using, and not feed our souls. He only that eats of “the bread that came down from heaven” shall live for ever.