EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
*And Many Explanatory Notes*.

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LUKE IX. 12–17.

12 And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place.

13 But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people.

14 For they were about five thou­sand men. And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company.

15 And they did so, and made them all sit down.

16 Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to hea­ven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude.

17 And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.

THE miracle described in these verses is more frequently related in the Gospels than any that our Lord wrought. There is no doubt a meaning in this repetition. It is intended to draw our special attention to the things which it contains.

We see, for one thing, in these verses, a *striking ex­ample of our Lord Jesus Christ’s divine power.* He feeds an assembly of five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes. He makes a scanty supply of victuals, which was barely sufficient for the daily wants of Himself and His disciples, satisfy the hunger of a company as large as a Roman legion. There could be no mistake about the reality and greatness of this miracle. It was done pub­licly, and before many witnesses. The same power which at the beginning made the world out of nothing, caused food to exist, which before had not existed. The circum­stances of the whole event made deception impossible. Five thousand hungry men would not have agreed that they were “all filled,” if they had not received real food. “Twelve baskets full of fragments” would never have been taken up, if real material loaves and fishes had not been miraculously multiplied. Nothing, in short, can explain the whole transaction, but the finger of God. The same hand which sent manna from heaven in the wilderness to feed Israel, was the hand which made five loaves and two fishes supply the wants of five thousand men.

The miracle before us is one among many proofs that with Christ nothing is impossible. The Saviour of sinners is Almighty. He “calleth those things which be not as though they were.” (Rom. iv. 17.) When He wills a thing, it shall be done. When He commands a thing, it shall come to pass. He can create light out of darkness, order out of disorder, strength out of weakness, joy out of sorrow, and food out of nothing at all. For ever let us bless God that it is so! We might well despair, when we see the corruption of human nature, and the desperate hardness and unbelief of man’s heart, if we did not know the power of Christ.—“Can these dry bones live? Can any man or woman be saved? Can any child, or friend of ours, ever become a true Christian? Can we ourselves ever win our way through to heaven?”—Questions like these could never be answered, if Jesus was not Almighty. But thanks be to God, Jesus has all power in heaven and earth. He lives in heaven for us, able to save to the uttermost, and therefore we may hope.

We see,for another thing, in these verses, a *striking emblem of Christ’s ability to supply the spiritual wants of mankind.* The whole miracle is a picture. We see init, as in a glass, some of the most important truths of Christianity. It is, in fact, a great acted parable of the glorious Gospel.

What is that multitude which surrounded our Lord in the wilderness, poor and helpless, and destitute of food? It is a figure of mankind. We are a company of poor sinners, in the midst of a wicked world, without strength, or power to save ourselves, and sorely in danger of perishing from spiritual famine.

Who is that gracious Teacher who had compassion on this starving multitude in the wilderness, and said to His disciples, “Give ye them to eat?” It is Jesus Himself, ever pitiful, ever kind, everready to show mercy, even to the unthankful and the evil. And He is not altered. He is just the same to day as Hewas eighteen hundred years ago. High in heaven at the right hand of God, He looks down on the vast multitude of starving sinners, who cover the face of the earth. He still pities them, still cares for them, still feels for their helplessness and need. And He still says to His believing followers, “Behold this multitude, give ye them to eat.”

What is that wonderful provision which Christ mirac­ulously made for the famishing multitude before Him? It is a figure of the Gospel. Weak and contemptible as that Gospel appears to many, it contains “enough and to spare” for the souls of all mankind. Poor and des­picable as the story of a crucified Saviour seems to the wise and prudent, it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. (Rom. i. 16.)

What are those disciples who received the loaves and fishes from Christ’s hand, and carried them to the multi­tude, till all were filled? They are a figure of all faithful preachers and teachers of the Gospel. Their work is simple, and yet deeply important. They are appointed to set before men the provision that Christ has made for their souls. Of their own invention they are not commissioned to give anything. All that they convey to men, must be from Christ’s hands. So long as they faithfully discharge this office, they may confidently expect their Master’s blessing. Many, no doubt, will always refuse to eat of the food that Christ has provided. But if ministers offer the bread of life to men faithfully, the blood of those who are lost will not be required at their hands.

What are we doing ourselves? Have we discovered that this world is a wilderness, and that our souls must be fed with bread from heaven, or die eternally? Happy are they who have learned this lesson, and have tasted by experience, that Christ crucified is the true bread of life! The heart of man can never be satisfied with the things of this world. It is always empty, and hungry, and thirsty, and dissatisfied, till it comes to Christ. It is only they who hear Christ’s voice, and follow Him, and feed on Him by faith, who are “filled.”

NOTES. LUKE. IX. 12–17.

14.—[*By* *fifties in a company.*]The word translated “company,” is only used in this place in the New Testament. It signifies “a company of people reclining at meat.”

Our Lord’s love of order and dislike to confusion, appear strongly in the description here given about the disposition of the multitude, before He fed them. He teaches us the import­ance of doing everything in an orderly methodical way.

17*.—*[*Of fragments...twelve baskets.*]Let our Lord’s disapproba­tion of waste be noted. If “the great Housekeeper of the world,” Burkitt says, “is so particular about saving fragments, what account will they give in the day of judgment, who think nothing of wasting time, money, health, and strength, in the service of sin and the world?”

The remark of Brentius on this miracle is worth notice. He says, “the whole sixth chapter of St. John is the true explanation of the use of this miracle. Christ is the bread of life, and he who eats of Him shall live for ever.”

[*Baskets.*]The Greek word so translated is only used in the New Testament, in the account given by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, of this miracle. It means a wicker basket such as the Jews were remarkable for carrying with them, as remarked even by the Roman poet, Juvenal. It is worthy of notice, that in the second miracle of feeding the multitude, recorded by Matthew and Mark only, where *seven baskets* of fragments were taken up, the word translated “basket,” is entirely different from that used here. It signifies, in that miracle, a large wicker basket, and is said by Hesychius to be a vessel for corn. At any rate, it means a very large basket, for it is the same word used where it is said that St. Paul was “let down in a basket from the wall.” (Acts ix. 25.)