**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MARK-031**. **THE WORLD'S BREAD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"30.* *And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. 31. And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. 32. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. 33. And the people saw them departing, and many knew Him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto Him. 34. And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things. 35. And when the day was now far spent, His disciples came unto Him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed: 36. Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat. 37. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto Him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? 38. He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. 39. And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. 40. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. 41. And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, He looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided He among them all. 42. And they did all eat, and were filled. 43. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. 44. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men."*

*Mark 6:30-44*

This is the only miracle recorded by all four Evangelists. Matthew brings it into immediate connection with John's martyrdom, while Mark links it with the Apostlesreturn from their first mission. His account is, as usual, full of graphic touches, while John shows more intimate knowledge of the parts played by the Apostles, and sets the whole incident in a clearer light.

**I. Mark brings out the preceding events, and especially the seeking for solitude, which was baulked by popular enthusiasm.**

The Apostles came back to Jesus full of wondering joy, and were eager to tell what they had done and taught. Note that order, which hints that they thought more of the miracles than of the message. They were flushed and excited by success, and needed calming down even more than physical rest. So Jesus, knowing their need, bids them come with Him into healing solitude, and rest awhile.

After any great effort, the body cries for repose, but still more does the soul's health demand quiet after exciting and successful work for Christ. Without much solitary communion with Jesus, effort for Him tends to become mechanical, and to lose the elevation of motive and the suppression of self which give it all its power. It is not wasted time which the busiest worker, confronted with the most imperative calls for service, gives to still fellowship in secret with God. There can never be too much activity in Christian work, but there is often disproportioned activity, which is too much for the amount of time given to meditation and communion. That is one reason why there is so much sowing and so little reaping in Christian work to-day.

But, on the other hand, we have sometimes to do as Jesus was driven to do in this incident; namely, to forgo cheerfully, after brief repose, the blessed and strengthening hour of quiet. The motives of the crowds that hurried round the head of the lake while the boat was pulled across, and so got to the other side before it, were not very pure. Curiosity drove them as much as any nobler impulse. But we must not be too particular about the reasons that induce men to resort to Jesus, and if we can give them more than they sought, so much the better. Let us be thankful if, for any reason, we can get them to listen.

Jesus came forth; that is, probably from a short withdrawal with the Twelve. Brief repose snatched, He turned again to the work. The great multitudedid not make Him impatient, though, no doubt, some of the Apostles were annoyed. But He saw deeply into their condition, and pity welled in His heart. If we looked on the crowds in our great cities with Christ's eyes, their spiritual state would be the most prominent thing in sight. And if we saw that as He saw it, disgust, condemnation, indifference, would not be uppermost, as they too often are, but some drop of His great compassion would trickle into our hearts. The masses are still as sheep without a shepherd, ignorant of the way, and defenceless against their worst foes. Do we habitually try to cultivate as ours Christ's way of looking at men, and Christ's emotions towards men? If we do, we shall imitate Christ's actions for men, and shall recognise that, to reproduce as well as we can the many thingswhich He taught them, is the best contribution which His disciples can make to healing the misery of a Christless world.

**II. The difference between John and Mark in regard to the conversation of Jesus with the disciples about finding food for the crowd, is easily harmonised.**

John tells us what Jesus said at the first sight of the multitude; Mark takes up the narrative at the close of the day. We owe to John the knowledge that the exigency was not first pointed out by the disciples, but that His calm, loving prescience saw it, and determined to meet it, long before they spoke. No needs arise unforeseen by Christ, and He requires no prompting to help. Difficulties which seem insoluble to us, when we too late wake to perceive them, have long ago been taken into account and solved by Him.

The Apostles, according to Mark, came with a suggestion of helpless embarrassment. They could think of nothing but to disperse the crowd, and so get rid of responsibility. He answers with a paradox of conscious power, which commands a seeming impossibility, and therein prophesies endowment that will make it possible. Has not the Church ever since been but too often faithless enough to let the multitudes drift away to the cities and villages round about, and there, amid human remedies for their sore needs, buy themselves, with much expenditure, a scanty provision? Are we not all tempted to shuffle off responsibility for the world's hunger? Do we not often think that our resources are absurdly insufficient, and so, faintheartedly make them still less? Is not His command still, Give ye them to eat? Let us rise to the height of our duties and of our power, and be sure that whoever has Christ has enough for the world's hunger, and is bound to call men from that which is not bread, and to feed them with Him who is.

Philip's morning calculation (curiously in keeping with his character) seems to have been repeated by the Apostles, as, no doubt, he had been saying the same thing all day at intervals. They had made a rough calculation of how much would be wanted. It was a sum far beyond their means. It was as much as about perhaps 200 day's wage. And where was such wealth as that in that company? But calculations which leave out Christ's power are not quite conclusive. The Apostles had reckoned up the requirement, but they had not taken stock of their resources. So they were sent to hunt up what they could, and John tells us that it was Andrew who found the boy with five barley loaves and two fishes. How came a boy to be so provident? Probably he had come to try a bit of trade on his own account. At all events, the Twelve seem to have been able to buy his little stock, which done, they went back to tell Jesus, no doubt thinking that such a meagre supply would end all talk of their giving the crowd to eat. Jesus would have us count our own resources, not that we may fling up His work in despair, but that we may realise our dependence on Him, and that the consciousness of our own insufficiency may not diminish one jot our sense of obligation to feed the multitude. It is good to learn our own weakness if it drives us to lean on His strength. Five loaves and two fishes, plus Jesus Christ, come to a good deal more than two hundred pennyworth of bread.

**III. The miracle is told with beautiful vividness and simplicity.**

Mark's picturesque words show the groups sitting by companies of hundreds or of fifties. He uses a word which means the square garden plots in which herbs are grown. So they sat on the green grass, which at that Passover season would be fresh and abundant. What half-amused and more than half-incredulous wonder as to what would come next would be in the people! Many of them would be saying in their hearts, and perhaps some in words, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?(Ps. 78:19). In that small matter Jesus shows that He is not the Author of confusion, but of order. The rush of five thousand hungry men struggling to get a share of what seemed an insufficient supply would have been unseemly and dangerous to the women and children, but the seated groups become as companies of guests, and He the orderer of the feast. To get at the numbers would be easy, while the passage of the Apostles through the groups was facilitated, and none would be likely to remain unsupplied or passed over.

The point at which the miraculous element entered is not definitely stated, but if each portion passed through the hands of Christ to the servers, and from them to the partakers, the multiplication of the bread must have been effected while it lay in His hand; that is to say, the loaves were not diminished by His giving. That is true about all divine gifts. He bestows, and is none the poorer. The streams flow from the golden vase, and, after all outpouring, it is brimful.

Many irrelevant difficulties have been raised about the mode of the miracle, and many lame analogies have been suggested, as if it but hastened ordinary processes. But these need not detain us. Note rather the great lesson which John records that our Lord Himself drew from this miracle. It was a symbol, in the material region, of His work in the spiritual, as all His miracles were. He is the Bread of the world. Ho gives Himself still, and in a yet more wonderful sense He gave His flesh for the life of the world. He gives us Himself for our own nourishment, and also that we may give Him to others. It was an honour to the Twelve that they should be chosen to be His almoners. It should be felt an honour by all Christians that through them Christ wills to feed a hungry world.

A somewhat different application of the miracle reminds us that Jesus uses our resources, scanty and coarse as five barley loaves, for the basis of His wonders. He did not create the bread, but multiplied it. Our small abilities, humbly acknowledged to be small, and laid in His hands, will grow. There is power enough in the Church, if the power were consecrated, to feed the world.

All four Gospels tell the command to gather up the broken pieces(not the fragments left by the eaters, but the unused pieces broken by Christ). This union of economy with creative power could never have been invented. Unused resources are retained. The exercise of Christian powers multiplies them, and after the feeding of thousands more remains than was possessed before. There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.