

Call to Obedience #300
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New Truth From an Old Story

By Reimar Schultze

“And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things. When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.” But He answered and said to them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to Him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?” But He said to them, “how many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they found out they said, “Five, and two fish.” Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all. So they all ate and were filled.”—Mark 6:34–44

This story of Jesus is timeless. But some of its jewels shine brighter in one age than in another. For example, this story of the feeding of the five thousand was given at the beginning of the church age. We are now at the consummation of that age. So let us gather some gems that need particular attention in the light of where the church is now.

Go to the Teachers

Be cautious about miracle workers “And Jesus when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things. (vs. 34). Are you getting it? This verse has been overshadowed for centuries by the immensity of the miracle that followed. But it is now time to consider the prelude to the miracle. Perhaps we need to see now that the feeding of the five thousand should take second place to the teaching of the sheep. Perhaps we should take notice here that the soul is more important than the stomach. Jesus came for both as the story teaches us, but it must be remembered that the body will perish but the soul will live forever. Jesus’ focus on that day was not on feeding the body but on feeding the soul: “He was moved with compassion” is the preface of the whole story. His compassion was for their fainting souls, for discouraged hearts, for disappointed lives. As He looked at the multitude, He saw that there was an unsatisfied hunger and thirst for the things of God.

Many preachers of the day were perhaps more interested in discussions of doctrinal purity or in gaining membership: traversing land and sea to make more converts. Jesus expressed this condition in Matt. 23:15-16: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made,

ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides." Can you see the picture? Increase membership at any cost! Isn't this what drives much of the church today? I have been asked over a hundred times, "Do you have any new members, yet?" But I can hardly recall if anybody ever asked me if I, by the help of God, had produced any saints.

Many of today's preachers have filled their sanctuaries, but they have emptied their prayer meetings. They have lowered the standards to get more in. Would Jesus have called these men the sons of hell and their converts twice the sons of hell? Oh, we need help from God, we preachers, don't we? If we just get people saved and baptized but don't teach them how to abide in Christ, how to walk with God, how to be praying saints, how to have unbroken fellowship with Jesus, what do we have? Peter also observed the same problem that for someone to be saved and not continue to walk with Jesus is worse than for Him never to have been saved at all: "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: A dog returns to his own vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22)." This connects to Jesus' statement in Rev. 3:15-16 that it is better to be cold (unsaved) than to be a lukewarm (backslidden) Christian when it comes to the Judgment Day. Are we preachers teaching our people how to stay on fire for God? Woe unto us if we are not!

Jesus had compassion on the multitude, they were sheep without shepherds and so He taught them many things, Hallelujah! What is "Many things"? What is in it? How many subjects does this represent? Does it include prayer, self-denial, waiting on God, love for all, forgiveness, sanctification, preferring one another, and fellowship with God? Oh, beware, my friend, of those who exalt miracles over teaching. A teacher can get me to heaven, but a miracle worker cannot. Don't run after the miracle workers, but run to the teachers and stay with them. Jesus did more miracles at Capernaum than in any other city. Yet when it was all said and done, Capernaum was condemned to hell. Miracles are wonderful, they are evidences of God's mercy and power and presence, but they do not bring us to spiritual maturity. When the 70 came back after their first mission, they excitedly reported the miracle of casting out demons. But Jesus said, "Don't be excited about this". Can you imagine that? He said don't be happy about this miracle. He said, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20) No joy you have should ever be greater than the fact that Jesus Christ died for the forgiveness of your sins and washed you clean in His precious blood. If you have a greater joy about anything other than that, then your spiritual life is out of balance. This is the primary and only purpose for which Jesus instituted the Lord's supper so that we remember Him for His work of salvation.

Another window for this great truth is the story of the woman who poured out her alabaster box to anoint Jesus for His burial. Jesus put her on a pedestal for the whole world to see. He said, "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt.

26:13). And what did she do? She, my friend, makes us remember that Jesus died for us. It is only through the cross that we identify with Him. So Jesus taught them many things. We need to be taught many things, above all, the life-giving power of the cross.

Put Reason into the Grave

Know that whatever God asks you to do, you cannot do. At the end of this day of teaching, the people were fainting physically, the disciples said, send them to the villages to buy food. That is reason, that is wisdom, that is the way of the professing church operating by wisdom and reason, by sound judgment. But that is not the way of the Kingdom of God. When you get into the Kingdom of God you get under Christ's Kingship and there reason is buried and the wisdom of man gets demoted to foolishness (1 Cor. 3:19).

Jesus gave reason a death sentence when he said to His apostles, "Give ye them to eat." Jesus gave reason a death sentence when He said to Lazarus, after he had been in the grave four days, "Lazarus, come forth!" God gave reason a death sentence when He told Moses to take Israel into the desert, or when He said to Israel, "Make this valley full of ditches" (2 Kings 3:16). Reason has no place in matters of the Kingdom. It is faith that takes the place of reason once you follow Jesus. "Give ye them to eat." By reason's standard, what a preposterous request that was! Whatever your fellow man asks you to do is reasonable. Your fellow man would never ask you to do something unless he has reason to believe that you can do it. But whatever God asks you to do, you cannot do but by faith. Reason has no victories for Christ. Reason has nothing to give to Christ. It has no trophies to lay at His feet nor jewels to place in His lovely crown. It stands empty-handed before God. All the inventions and works of men, from the invention of the wheel to travel in space, have nothing to give to God because they came out of reason. Whatever you accomplish by reason will be nothing at the judgment seat. Only what has been wrought by faith will receive a smile from the Savior's brow. Oh, give yourselves to faith, dear Christian: "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17).

Jesus truly expected the disciples to feed the multitudes by faith as He did after they failed. They said two hundred pennyworth of bread is not enough. Five loaves and two fishes is not enough. True, by reason's measure, but God is more than enough for anything. "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matt. 9:29).

Jesus said, "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). In other words, it was possible for these disciples to have fed the 5,000 men. It was a matter of faith. All that Jesus wanted was that the Bible would read "and the twelve disciples took the bread and brake it and blessed it and 5,000 men were fed." How much would that have strengthened our faith. But they didn't have that faith as yet. Oh, my friend, may we not fail the test of faith when Jesus tells us to do something. Have Faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb.11:6). Whatever Jesus asks you to do, you can only do by faith.

God is a God of Order

Another lesson from this story is that there must be order "Then he commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass" (vs. 39). Jesus likes order, God likes order. God created the universe and there is nothing, absolutely nothing out of order in that vast infinite expanse. But as God likes order in the universe He also likes order in the church. Oh, how many people speak out of order in many-a church? How many times do parents take their children in

and out of the sanctuary when the holy anointing is upon the preacher? Where there is disorder, there is disobedience and where there is disobedience, the ground of faith is drying up. God said to King Hezekiah, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live" (2 Kings 20:1). God wants us to die having everything in order. This means primarily, keep your spiritual house in order. Your attitude, your relationship with God and man; your motives and desires. Yes, don't only die that way, but live that way.

Jesus commanded them to sit down—not anywhere, all crowding around him body to body, but by groups of 100's and 50's so there would be aisles between them to make the serving of this miracle possible. Jesus commanded, the people obeyed, and the bread was passed out by servants in an orderly manner and no one was missed. If there is a lack of order, it may prevent a miracle or some people may be missed. We need order in our churches and in our lives. We need disciplines to uphold order: self-denial to subdue and crucify our passions as we put ourselves under Jesus' authority. And as we put ourselves under His authority, the stage is set for revival. Then it says, "So they all ate and were filled" (vs. 42). The real meaning of this is that they gorged themselves. They ate until they could not hold another bite. The same expression "they were filled" or they gorged themselves is also found in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). That is "they shall gorge themselves."

So Jesus came that we may have life and that we may have it more abundantly. This He offered to the five thousand at the Sea of Galilee and He offers it to us now. Appreciate miracles, trust for them, but remember it is by far greater that we all be taught of God to "do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God" (Mic. 6:8).

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