

Sabbath School Lesson #7 – Lord of Jews and Gentiles – 7-13 May 2016

Christ was given to us by His Father: “I, the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:6). We focus on Christ giving Himself as the bread of life as demonstrated in His feeding the multitude. As Christ saw the multitude around Him as He taught (five thousand men besides women and children), He asked Philip, but in the hearing of all the disciples, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (John 6:5). Philip made a hasty calculation, and said, “Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little” (John 6:7). Remember that the purchasing power of money was very different then from what it is now. A penny was the ordinary wage for a day’s labour (see Matthew 20:1-2). Two pence was a good deposit toward the lodging and care of an invalid at an Inn (see Luke 10:30-35). Two hundred pence would therefore buy a great quantity of bread, yet not enough so that each one of the multitude could have just a taste, and Philip could see no way of helping the hungry crowd.

It was very evident to the disciples that no matter how great the need of the multitude, and how disposed they themselves were to assist them, the thing could not be done. So they said to Jesus, “Send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals” (Matthew 14:15). But even if this were done, many must have gone hungry, having no money to buy with. “Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat” (Matthew 14:16). The business sense of disciples was brought into requisition, and they looked over their resources, and found so meagre a supply that it was useless to speak about it. Peter, acting as spokesman for the twelve, said, “There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?” (John 6:9). Clearly nothing could be done. ‘Oh, no; it is useless to talk; we want to feed the hungry people, but we have nothing worth mentioning to do it with, we have carefully considered the situation, and it is absolutely impossible to do anything. Oh, if we only had the means!’

All this time Jesus “Himself knew what He would do” (John 6:6). Business calculations of the disciples, and the demonstration that they were in too straitened circumstances to allow of their doing anything to help, did not affect Him in the least. He was not discouraged at the prospect. Five loaves and two fishes? Oh, that is an abundance! “Make the men sit down” (verse 10). Everything must be orderly. We do not want any pushing and crowding, any unseemly scramble for the overflow of food that is to be provided. There must be no chance for some weak, timid person to be overlooked. Moreover there must be quiet, so that all can have opportunity to think upon the wondrous gift of God, and upon the Giver. Let the men be still, that they may recognise God. So the men sat down, “and Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set 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” (John 6:11-13).

The Lord allows us to realise our helplessness. His question, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” was calculated to emphasise the great need and their lack of means. But remember that the question was not one of doubt. “He Himself knew what He would do.” Let this case, then, stand as the type of all. How often we have felt our hearts stirred as we have seen poverty and suffering, and have longed to help, and have mourned our inability. Now that desperate situation, that was made so vivid to us, was only the repetition of the Lord’s question to Philip, ‘Whence shall we supply these hungry souls with food?’ And just as the question was asked then to prove the disciples, so the desperate need is set before us so vividly in order to prove us. How often we have been tested in this manner, and yet we have not learned the lesson. May we begin now. Jesus would not send people away hungry. He would not allow the disciples to do so. He always feeds the hungry. Therefore we may be assured that when we allow people to go away hungry for food either for the body or the soul, we ignore or deny the presence of the Master among us. “He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked” (1 John 2:6). He says, “Verily, verily I say unto you, he that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father” (John 14:12).

“They need not depart; give ye them to eat.” Why did Jesus say that? – Because it was so. Jesus did not trifle with the disciples. He knew what *He* would do; the question was, Did they know what *they* would do? Yes; they knew that they would “send the multitude away”

empty (Matthew 14:15); but they did not need to. His question to Philip was for the purpose of proving him, and the rest of the disciples as well. The words of Jesus show that if they had but recognised their opportunity they might have fed the multitude the same as He did. And the lesson is recorded for our sakes. 'How can we give when we have nothing?' – Just the same as Jesus did when He had nothing; for He did not do anything while here on this earth, except as *man*. 'Yes; but it pleased the Father that in Him all fulness should dwell, and it was of the abundant fulness that was in Him, that He fed the multitudes.' Very true; "and of His fulness have all we received" (John 1:16). The same Christ is alive today, and dwells among us; and if we but allow Him to dwell in our hearts *by* faith, we shall also "be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). What a marvellous manifestation of the power of God's grace! that having nothing we should be able to give everything. "We then as workers together with Him beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain;" and we approve ourselves as the ministers of God, "as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:1, 10). Let us grasp this by faith!

When God's professed people have Christ's abiding presence through His holy Spirit, as a reality of which they are conscious, they will never pass a needy soul by without supplying more than he asks or thinks to receive. God gives us richly all things to enjoy. "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). Everybody therefore has everything given him. Most people, however, do not recognise the gifts of God. Not only do they not know God as the Giver of every good and perfect gift, but they do not know how abundantly He gives, even when they know that He does give something. We need to realise that it is the business of God's servants, therefore, "to open the blind eyes" (Isaiah 42:7), that men may know the boundless grace of God, and the gift by grace. They are to be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). But oh, how sad it is when those who profess to know God are themselves blind to the riches of the glory of their inheritance. Who is there of us who has not discounted the words of Jesus, and the lessons that He has left us, so much that they have scarcely any more meaning to us than as mere stories? Shall we not learn?

As we have freely received, so are we freely to give. That is, we are to give as much as we have received, and on the same terms. We have received everything; we are to give everything. Not having a big stock to carry about with us to exhibit does not prove that we have nothing. God is our treasure house. "The unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8) are all and always "in Him," for "in Him are all things created," and "in Him all things consist," and He is ours. He saves us the trouble of looking after and caring for our vast property, while we have all the use of it on demand. He says, "Concerning the work of My hands, command ye Me" (Isaiah 45:11). These are realities; these are not empty words.

God is trying to teach the world that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). He would have us know, and teach others, that He cares for us, and keeps us. He would have all men know that all things come from Him, so that all may give Him glory, by receiving from Him the things that He gives. True, He has said that the man who will not work shall not eat, but that does not teach us that man must support himself. No man on earth 'earns his own living.' No man can earn a living. Life is too precious a commodity to be bought with money, or earned by human labour. Life is a gift. God "*giveth* to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). The occasions when He gives us direct help, when it is manifest that we are unable to do anything for ourselves, are to show us that even where we are most active we simply gather up what He showers down.

When Christ's followers rise to their privileges as "workers together with Him," realising that He was on earth as a representative Man, showing what every child of God ought to do when occasion calls for it, the world will see that there is something better than what this world can give. They will not all believe, but the work that God designs for the world will speedily be accomplished. They will see that poverty does not handicap a man of God; that the expression "rich in faith" is not an empty phrase; and that the poor Christian can do what the wealthy worldling cannot. How to give with nothing is the lesson that God teaches, for He takes the things that are not, when He has a great work to do. Let us know that a great need only magnifies God's gift. Instead of despair when we cannot see a way to accomplish a necessary thing, we recall Christ Himself is the way, our "new and living way" (Hebrews 10:20). Knowing His real presence, we do not need to be worried over 'ways and means.' When Christ asked Philip how to buy bread for the multitude, he might well have answered, 'Lord, Thou knowest, for Thou art the Bread.' In giving bread, Christ showed that He "gave Himself for us," so are we to give ourselves. This we can really do when we can say, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but, Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20).