

The Christian's Mission

and how to fulfil it.

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[This little book is sent forth to the Church of God "To all that, in every place, call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. both theirs and ours" with earnest prayer that it may be used of the Holy Spirit to awaken in the hearts of all who may read it a true sense of the Christian's mission, and a fixed purpose to seek, by the grace of God, to fulfil it.

We need to be reminded, in days like the present, that every child of God, every member of the body of Christ, whatever be his position or sphere of action, has a mission to fulfil — a work to do for Christ. He may not be called to be an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher: but he is called to live Christ to represent Him — to be a channel of communication between His loving heart and every form of need, in this poor dark, cold, selfish world. This is the Christian's mission: may every Christian seek to fulfil it!]

In those days the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto Him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat: and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way; for divers of them came from far. And His disciples answered Him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And He asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And He commanded the people to sit down on the ground; and He took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to His disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes; and He blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled; and they took up of the broken meat that was left, seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand, and He sent them away" (Mark 8: 1-9).

The foregoing passage presents a very striking and beautiful illustration of one special feature of the Christian's mission in this world, which the reader will do well to ponder. It is of immense importance, and of universal application. It concerns every child of God. We have each one to remember, that we are sent into this world to be a channel of communication between the heart of Christ and every form of need that may cross our path from day to day.

This is an interesting and lovely feature of the Christian's mission. True, it is only one of the many features, but it is one of exceeding preciousness and beauty. It is pre-eminently practical too, as we shall see.

Of course, of necessity, it assumes that I am a Christian. If I do not know that I have eternal life, if I am at all doubtful as to my eternal salvation, if I do not know Christ as my own precious Saviour and Lord — the portion, the object, and the resting-place of my heart — to occupy myself with the Christian's mission is simply to deceive myself, and blind my eyes to my true condition. A known and enjoyed salvation, and a known and enjoyed Saviour and Lord, are absolutely essential conditions for it.

Having said thus much, to guard the reader against self-deception, as also to guard our subject against any misapprehension, we shall look, for a few moments, at the lovely passage which stands at the head of this paper. May the blessed Spirit open and apply it to our hearts!

"In those days, the multitude being *very great*, and having *nothing to eat*." Here was the state of the case — great need, and no apparent resources to meet it. But Jesus was there — blessed be His holy name! — in all the love of His heart, and the almighty power of His hand. He was there who, of old, had fed three millions of people, in a vast howling wilderness, for forty years. Yes, He was here, and, of course, He could at once, and directly, have met the need without calling His poor unbelieving and self-occupied disciples into the scene at all. He could have summoned angelic messengers from Heaven to wait upon those hungry thousands.

But He did neither the one nor the other, because it was His gracious purpose to use His disciples as channels of communication between Himself and that vast hungry multitude. Not merely as instruments of His *power*; which angels might be, but the very expression of His *heart*.

And let us note *how* He did this. Had He merely intended to use them as instruments of His power, it would have sufficed to put the ways and means into their hands. But no; He wanted to make them channels through which the tender compassion of His heart might flow out. And how was this to be done? Thus: "He called His disciples unto Him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their own houses they will faint by the way; for divers of them came from far."

Here, then, we have the true secret of preparation of our high and holy mission. Our blessed Lord first gathers His disciples round Himself, and seeks to fill their hearts with His own feelings and thoughts ere He fills their hands with the loaves and fishes. It is as if He had said, "I have compassion, and I want you to have it also. I want you to enter into all my thoughts and feelings, to think as I do, and feel as I do. I want you to look with mine eyes at this hungry multitude, in order that you may be in a moral condition to be My channels."

This is uncommonly fine. A person may say, "I long to be a channel, but it seems quite too high, quite beyond me. How could I ever attain to such a height?" The answer is, Get near enough to Christ to think as He thinks, to feel as He feels. Drink into His spirit. This, be assured of it, is the true, the only way to be a channel of communication. If I say, "I must try and be a channel," I shall make a fool of myself. But if I drink at the fountain of Christ's heart, I shall be filled to overflowing, my whole moral being will be permeated by His spirit, so that I shall be in a fit condition to be used by Him, and I shall be sure to make a right use of — that is, to use for Him — whatever ways and means He may put into my hands. If I get my hands full of means, before my heart is full of Christ, I shall not use the means for Him, I shall use them for my own glory, and not for the glory of God.

Brethren, Let us ponder this. Let us consider our mission, and the true secret of fulfilling it. It is a grand point to have the heart impressed with the fact, that we are called to be channels through which the heart of Christ may flow out to His own, and to a needy world. It is wonderful, it seems too good to be true; but, blessed be God, it is as true as it is wonderful. Let us only seek to take it in — to believe it, to make it our own. Let us not content ourselves with admiring it as a beautiful theory, but seek to have it wrought into our souls by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit.

But mark how slow the disciples were in responding to the desire of the heart of Christ respecting them. It was His gracious purpose to use them as His channels, to bestow upon them this immense privilege; but they, like ourselves, were little able to appreciate it, simply because they failed to enter into His thoughts, and to apprehend the glory of His Person. "His disciples answered Him, From whence *can a man* satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" On another occasion they said, "We have here but five loaves and two fishes."

Did they not know, or had they forgotten, that they were in the immediate presence of the Creator

and Sustainer of the universe? True, He was there in the lowly form of Jesus of Nazareth. His divine glory was hidden from nature's view behind the veil of humanity. But they ought to have known better who and what He was, and how to avail themselves of His glorious presence, and of His unsearchable riches. Surely, had their hearts at all apprehended the glory of His Person, they could never have asked such a question as, "Whence can *a man* satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" Moses, of old, had asked "Whence should I have flesh to give to all this people?" God is shut out by the poor unbelieving heart. Did Jehovah ask Moses to provide flesh? Surely not. No mere man could do it. Neither could a mere man feed four thousand in a desert place.

But God was there. Yes, it was God, speaking through human lips, who had said, "I have compassion on the multitude." It was God who took account of all the circumstances of each individual in that vast multitude of hungry fainting people. He knew the exact distance each one had travelled, and the length of time each one had been fasting. He took account of the sure consequences of their being dismissed without food. It was God who gave utterance to those touching words, "I cannot send them away fasting, lest they faint by the way, for divers of them came from far."

Yes, God was there, in all the tenderness of a love, which could take account of the most minute details of a creature's weakness, and a creature's necessity. There, too, in His almighty power and exhaustless resources and there to enable His poor disciples to be the depositaries of His thoughts, the vessels of His goodness, the channels of His grace. And what did they want, in order to be able to fulfil their mission? Did they want to be, or to do, anything? No; they simply want to see Him, and to use Him. They wanted to exercise that simple faith which counts on God for everything, and finds all its springs in Him.

Thus it was with the disciples, and thus it is with us. If we want to act as the channels of the grace of Christ, we must have to do with Him in the deep secret of our own souls. We must learn of Him; we must feed upon Him; we must know the meaning of communion with His heart; we must be near enough to Him to know the secrets of His mind, and carry out the purposes of His love. If we would reflect Him, we must gaze upon Him. If we would reproduce Him, we must feed upon Him, we must have Him dwelling in our hearts by faith. We may depend upon it, that what is really in our hearts will come out in our lives. We may have a quantity of truth in our heads, and flippantly flowing from our lips, but if we really desire to be channels of communication between His heart and the needy ones in the scene through which we are passing, we must habitually drink into His love. It cannot possibly be in any other way. "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 8: 38).

Here lies the grand secret of the whole matter: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." If the rivers are to flow, we must drink. It cannot be otherwise. If every member of the Church of God were in the power of this great principle, what a very different state of things we should witness! And where lies the hindrance? We are not straitened in our adorable Lord and Saviour. It is His desire to use us, just as He used His disciples on the occasion before us. He gathered them round Himself, and graciously sought to pour into their hearts the compassion of His own heart, in order that they might feel with Him, as the moral qualification for acting *for Him*. We may always feel assured that where the heart is full of Christ, the power to act will not be lacking.

But, alas! as it was with the disciples, so it is with us. They failed in appreciating and using the power that was in their midst. They said, "Whence can a man?" when they ought to have said, "We have Christ." They practically ignored Him, and so do we. We make excuses for our poverty, our indolence, our coldness, our indifference, by the plea that we have not got this, and that, and the other;

whereas, what we really want is a heart full of Christ — full of His thoughts, full of His love, full of His kindness, full of His tender consideration for others, full of His beautiful self-forgetfulness. We complain of our want of ways and means, when what we really want is the right condition of soul — the true moral attitude of the heart, and this can only spring from close intimacy with Christ, communion with his mind, and drinking into His spirit.

We would very earnestly press this subject upon the Church of God. We long to see every member of the body of Christ acting as a channel through which His precious grace may flow out in living streams to all around, shedding freshness and verdure in its course — and not a stagnant pool, so strikingly illustrative of a Christian out of communion.

[Note. — we should ever remember. that we are not to be *expectants* from the scene around us, but *contributors*. A true contributor never complains of want of love. He walks in love and manifests love and his language is, "I have all and abound." Oh, that it were thus with us all!]