

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 100 Whence? A Word for the New Year

Reading: John 6. 1-14

1 After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias.

2 And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.

3 And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.

4 And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

5 When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?

6 And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.

7 Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,

9 There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but

what are they among so many?

10 And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

11 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.

12 When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

13 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.

14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.

Address

This is usually known as "The Feeding of the Five Thousand," and I take it that some special, peculiar importance is attached to this miracle. Why do I say that? Because of all the many miracles of the Lord Jesus, it is the only one that appears in Matthew, and Mark, and Luke and John. There is not any vain repetition in Scripture, so there must be some special significance when this is

the one miracle that is repeated in every single Gospel. It is a most beautiful miracle – the wonderful compassion of the Lord Jesus, His sympathy, His understanding, His divine power, His ability to do an impossible thing, His willingness to do it, that their needs might be supplied.

So as we linger at the beginning of the new year, before we venture forth into it, surely one great thing we seek is that our souls might be fed throughout this new year, that the same Lord Jesus who fed the multitude might feed us.

“Oft feed us, Lord, beneath this vine,
Through the new year with heavenly bread;
Oft clothe Thy Word with power divine,
To break the rocks and raise the dead.

“Oft by a Saviour’s dying love,
To many a wounded heart revealed,
Temptations, fears, and guilt remove,
And be our Sun, and Strength, and Shield.”

The Lord Jesus meant this by speaking of Himself as the Bread of life. “I am the Bread of life” – the only One who can meet the innermost, deep longings of our soul, One who is willing to do it, who has promised to do it, who has bidden us draw near that He may do it. May there be that feeding of the church of God that He has purchased with His own blood.

You see so many, many needs before you this year – providentially, spiritually, or family, or business. This same Jesus who broke the bread, who multiplied the bread, who performed the miracle, who supplied all their needs, He still has that same power to do it.

Really, it was one word which laid hold on my spirit: the word *whence*. Jesus said to Philip, “*Whence* shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” Whence, or in other words, where from? It is a question we continually ask, we must ask. We will ask it during this year. “Whence?” Where shall strength come from to uphold us? Where shall that grace come from, to forgive us, to keep us from falling? Where shall wisdom come from, to lead, guide, order and direct our steps? It may be with some of you some special providential need that weighs on you tonight. Now, “Whence?” Where shall the supply of that need come from? Or it may be your poor prayers. Where shall the answer come from?

“Whence?” Now I think you know the answer already. At least, you know it in the Bible in the letter, but may you know it in your heart. Two cautions: beware of looking at things, looking at circumstances. There were two disciples who tried to give an answer to this question, “Whence?” One was Philip and the other was Andrew. With one of them, all he could do was look at things, look at circumstances, look at people, look at the multitude, look at the greatness of the need, look at the impossibility of the case, look at the small resources they had, look at the limited supplies they had. That will never do! That will never bring an answer to this question, “Whence?” You know what Pharaoh said to the Israelites when they came down into Egypt: “Regard not your stuff.” So often we are regarding our stuff – whether we can manage, whether we have sufficient ability, whether we have sufficient resources. That is what one of them was doing – looking at all these insurmountable mountains which appeared to be in the way.

And what was the other one doing? He was trying to work out the answer, trying to reason it out. You will not be able to work out the answer to your problems. The Lord will never allow you to do that!

Well, poor Philip and Andrew! When they had finished, where had they come? The complete impossibility of the case and their own complete impotence and helplessness. And then – when man was at the end of his resources; then – when the disciples saw the case to be impossible; then – when every human thought had failed; then the Lord performed the miracle. He is still a miracle-performing God. We have proved that. And He will be this year, as He was last.

O but this *whence!* Do not be a Philip. Do not be an Andrew. Rather may you be able to put the question back into the Lord’s hand. “For He Himself knew what He would do.” Andrew does not; Philip does not; but the Lord Jesus does! And may it be something like this: “Lord Jesus, it has pleased Thee that in Thee should all fulness dwell. Thou art almighty, and Thy love and Thy grace and Thy compassion are as great as Thy power. Though so often we are perplexed, Thy wisdom is infinite. Thou Thyself dost ever know what Thou wilt do. Then Lord Jesus, Thou must be everything and Thou must do everything.” And you will see this almighty arm. You will see this wonder-performing God. You will see the riches of His grace, the blessings of His salvation. Then what will you do? There is nothing you can do, but you will “stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.”

*This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Monday, 7th January, 1985*

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Upheld by Thy supporting hand,
We pass, O Lord, from year to year;
And still we meet, at Thy command,
To seek Thy gracious presence here.

Oft feed us, Lord, beneath this vine,
Through the new year with heavenly bread;
Oft clothe Thy Word with power divine,
To break the rocks and raise the dead.

Oft by a Saviour's dying love,
To many a wounded heart revealed,
Temptations, fears, and guilt remove,
And be our Sun, and Strength, and Shield.

J. Newton