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## Food for the Hungry

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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"Give ye them to eat" (Matt. 14:16; cf. Mark 6; Luke 9; John 6).

It is significant that the feeding of a multitude by Jesus is something recorded by all four writers of the Gospels, even if the two occasions are not reported by each.

This significance in its general meaning can be easily recognized, although John focuses the occasion upon the particular point of the Person of Christ; that is the statement of Christ - "I am the living bread", and carries upward to the "Father" and right back to Israel in the wilderness.

There are some points in this universally recorded work of the Lord which are to be noted.

1. The deep and heartfelt concern of the Lord that people should be fed. "He had compassion on the multitude". John very carefully, meticulously, and fully transfers this, as from the lips of Jesus, to the *spiritual* life, as of far greater importance than the physical. But the physical necessity is an illustration of the spiritual.

God has so constituted the human body that its very life, strength, growth, energy, and usefulness depend upon food. The very *fact* of the New Testament is a powerful declaration that, what is true of the physical body, is - at least - true of the spiritual life in every respect.

Multitudes of Christians seem to think (if they do think about it at all) that, once they are born again, work is the only thing that matters, and that this can be done without sound, solid, and ample food. Growth does not matter. Energy can be found without feeding. Endurance does not depend upon nourishment. This is a mistake which will find such people out, sooner or later. Jesus did not so

think. The very survival of the multitude depended - in His judgment - upon their being fed. It was a precaution against "Lest they faint". Such a possibility and probability gives immense significance to the spiritual food question.

A weak, feeble, poor, stunted, dissatisfied condition in the life of the Christian is certain to follow - at some time - poverty, scarcity, or meagreness of spiritual food. There was a generation of strong, robust, and fruitful saints, the values of whose lives have come down to us in their written lives and ministries. It is impressive to note how the substantial nature of that generation is being called back in the reproduction of that ministry today. That was the generation of such men as A. J. Gordon, A. T. Pierson, A. B. Simpson, F. B. Meyer (to mention only a few), and it was the time of the *inception* of the convention movement which had as its basic motive "the deepening of the spiritual life".

What a galaxy of stalwarts "Northfield" (in America) and "Keswick" (in England) represented and produced in those days. The repercussions and momentum of those times and ministries lie behind much of the original missionary work in many lands. Missionary work in its strongest and purest nature sprang out of - indeed was an extension of - those days of spiritual solidity and strength.

The names of Pierson, Gordon, Simpson, Hudson Taylor, Inglis, Andrew Murray, etc. are tied in with the two aspects, the convention movement and the missionary movement. These have been largely separated in our time, and the solid background or foundation is lacking in the greater part of missionary work and workers.

Let us recover and bring forward the attitude and concern of our Lord, as demonstrated in the multitude-feeding on record for the recognition of the Church in all ages. His very Person and glory are bound up with a people well fed and satisfied! Do not let us allow ourselves to separate compassion from the food question. Jesus did not!

2. Then note the time factor in the act of Jesus. Jesus did not intervene casually. He did not just say: 'Perhaps we had better let the people have something to eat now. Let's have a little interval and diversion, and eat something.' There would probably - in such case - have been those who were not particularly interested in feeding. Or there might have been those who were more interested in temporal food than in spiritual. But Jesus moved when, and because, the situation was critical, essential, and imperative.

The Lord may be generous in His provision, but He is neither casual nor wasteful. The record shows that He conserves even in His bountifulness. There was real hunger and felt need. The Lord only provides when this is true of those concerned. Little hunger - little food. Little appetite - frugal provision. The Lord's compassion is for those who are consciously hungry to the point of real necessity. It is a fixed way with the Lord that He does not move until something like desperation makes it evident that it is *His* move, and is supernatural. The disciples would say, "Send them away"; 'Let them fend for themselves'. But Jesus knows when things are beyond that point, and buys the situation for Himself.

3. Then we note the intermediaries of provision.

Human agency and instrumentality was drawn into responsibility. The resources were definitely *not* with the disciples, and they knew it to be so. They were extended and taxed as to their faith and obedience. Their responsibility was not to provide but - *knowing the Lord* - to form a link between the need and the supply; between scarcity and abundance.

Many who take positions of responsibility amongst the people of God are themselves a limitation. The people are starved, but the intermediaries stand in the way. They have not got the resources themselves, but they do not move to bring them from where they are.

Like the story of 'the friend at midnight' in Luke 11, it is necessary to know where bread is to be found, and then, even if at considerable personal inconvenience, see to it that the need is brought into touch with the supply.

Jesus would teach us that: -

1. He is really concerned about the spiritual food question.
2. He will provide when - and only when - there is a real need.
3. He lays the responsibility upon intermediaries, and that the state of His people lies at their door.

*"Give ye them to eat".*