

Spiritual Food for a Hungry World

by Billy Sunday

The church has the power to feed the hungry world through the principles of Christianity and the person of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:2, 1 Timothy 5:7, 2 Timothy 4:7, Revelation 1:7

Topics: "Holy Living", "Christian Morality"

Description

The preacher emphasizes the importance of living a life without reproach, being above criticism, inviolable, unassailable, and irreprehensible. This involves conducting oneself in a manner that cannot be faulted or blamed, demonstrating a higher morality that is free from fault. The sermon highlights the need to rely on the Spirit of Christ for the desire and power to live without reproach, as seen in the examples of overseers in 1 Timothy. The imminent return of Christ serves as a strong incentive for holy living and faithful obedience to God's commands, motivating believers to keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Transcript

"They need not depart; give ye them to eat." - Matthew 14:16.

Some folks do not believe in miracles. I do. A denial of miracles is a denial of the virgin birth of Jesus. The Christian religion stands or falls on the virgin birth of Christ. God created Adam and Eve without human agencies. He could and did create Jesus supernaturally. I place no limit on what God can do. If you begin to limit God, then there is no God.

I read of a preacher who said that the miracles of the Bible were more of a hindrance than a help. Then he proceeded to spout his insane blasphemy. He imagined Jesus talking to the five thousand and, like many speakers, overrunning his time limit. The disciples, seeing night coming, said: "Master, you have talked this crowd out of their supper and there is nothing to eat in this desert place; dismiss them so they can go into the towns and country and get food."

He imagined Jesus saying: "We have some lunch, haven't we?"

"Yes, but not enough to feed this crowd."

"Well, let's divide it up and see." So, Jesus proceeds to divide his lunch with the hungry crowd.

An old Jew, seeing Jesus busy, asked, "What's he doing?" "Dividing his lunch." "Huh," grunts this old knocker, "He is the first preacher I've ever seen who practices what he preaches." Shamed by the example of Jesus, this old tight-wad brought out his lunch basket and began to divide. Others caught the spirit and followed suit and in this way the five thousand were fed. This heretic of a so-called preacher thought such an occurrence more reasonable than the Bible account. Every attempt to explain the miracles by natural laws gets the explainer into great difficulty and shows him up as ridiculous.

I wish to draw some practical lessons from this miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand. The world is hungry. Jesus stood face to face with the problem of physical hunger just as we, in our day face, the problem of hunger, not only physical but spiritual.

If one were to believe all the magnificent articles in current and religious literature, one would think the world is disgusted and indifferent to the religion of Jesus Christ. I believe exactly the opposite is true. In no century since the morning stars sang together has there been more real hunger for genuine religion than this. And yet, many a preacher, instead of trying to feed this spiritual hunger, is giving some book review, staking a claim out on Jupiter or talking evolution, trying to prove we came from a monkey with his prehensile tail wrapped around a limb shying coconuts at his neighbor across the alley.

The world is not disgusted with religion, but is disgusted with the worldliness, rituals, ceremonies and non-essentials in which we have lost religion.

There are some kinds of religion the world is not hungry for a religion of formal observances. In Isaiah, first chapter, the Lord says:

"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. Incense is an abomination unto me; your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth. When you make prayers, I will not hear them. Your hands are full of blood. Put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil, learn to do well."

Their formalism didn't make a hit with the Lord. He saw through their smoke screen. Religion does not consist in doing a lot of special things, even if branded as religious, but in doing everything in a special way as the Lord directs. Whenever the church makes its observances and forms the end, instead of the means to the end, the world will turn its back on it.

Praying is not an act of devotion-reading - the Bible is not an act of devotion - going to church is not an act of devotion - partaking of the communion is not an act of devotion; these are aids to devotion. The actual religion lies not in prayer, reading the Bible, church attendance, but in the quality of life which these observances create in you. If the doing of these things does not change your life, then it profits you nothing to have them done. Thousands forget religion and allow the forms of religion to take the place of religion. They are substituting religiousness for righteousness. Jesus alone can save the world, but Jesus can't save the world alone. He needs our help.

The world is not hungry for a religion of theory. There was a time when people were interested intensely in fine-spun theological theories. You could announce a debate on the forms of baptism and pack the house with the S. R. O. sign hanging out. That day has passed; a debate on baptism or predestination would not draw a corporal's guard. The average man has not lost interest in the vital truths connected with these topics, but he has lost interest in the type of religion that spends its energy in argument, word battles, and wind jamming. Religion should relate to life and conduct as well as theory.

There has never been a time in my memory when religion has been so reduced to forms and ritual as today. In the mind of Jesus, religion was not to build up the church, but the church was to build up religion. Religion was not the end but the means to the end. Jesus was so far removed from the formalism and traditions, taught by the priests instead of teaching the commands of God, that he was constantly at cross-purposes with them. A church of make-believers will soon beget a generation of non-believers.

The church in endeavoring to serve God and Mammon is growing cross-eyed, losing her power to know good from evil. Jesus dealt with fundamentals; his quietest talk had a torpedo effect on his hearers. Some sermons, instead of being a bugle call to service, are showers of spiritual cocaine.

I am satisfied that there has never been a time when it is harder to live a consistent Christian life than now. I believe the conflict between God and the Devil, right and wrong, was never hotter. The allurements of sin have never been more fascinating. I do not believe there ever was a time, since Adam and Eve were turned out of Eden, when traps and pitfalls were more numerous and dangerous than today.

The world is not hungry for a religion of social service without Christ. I will go with you in any and all movements for the good of humanity providing you give Jesus Christ his rightful place. You cannot bathe anybody into the kingdom of God. You cannot change their hearts by changing their sanitation. It is an entirely good and Christian act to give a down-and-outer a bath, bed and a job. It is a Christian act to maintain schools and universities, but the road into the kingdom of God is not by the bath tub, the university, social service, or gymnasium, but by the blood-red road of the cross of Jesus Christ.

The Bible declares that human nature is radically bad and the power to uplift and change is external; that power is not in any man, woman or system, but by repentance and faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The church is the one institution divinely authorized to feed the spiritual hunger of this old sin-cursed world.

You will notice that Jesus did not feed the multitude. He created the food and asked his disciples to distribute it. Jesus was the chef, not the waiter at this banquet. Jesus created salvation, the only food that will feed the spiritual hunger of the world; the task of distributing the food is in the hands of his human followers.

For every two nominal Christians, there are three who are not even nominal. Out of every two church members, one is a spiritual liability; four out of five with their names on our church records are doing nothing to bring the world to Jesus. There are twenty million young men in this country between the ages of sixteen and thirty [1925]. Nineteen million are not members of any church; nine million attend church occasionally; ten million never darken a church door.

Seventy-four per cent of our criminals are young men under twenty-one years of age. In the past twenty-five years the age of prostitutes has fallen from twenty-six years of age to seventeen years of age. Five hundred girls fifteen years old and under were divorced or widowed last year. Juvenile crime increased in one year from thirty-two per cent to a hundred and thirty-eight per cent.

There are many institutions that enter into competition with the church in preaching certain phases of religion, but not in preaching religion itself. Associate charities preach charity sometimes with stronger emphasis than the church. Some organizations talk about justice and square-dealing with more vehemence than the church. Some individuals thunder against vice and crime more than the pulpit. Many institutions and organizations preach one or more phases of religion, but it is to the church humanity must

ever turn for the last word on salvation and eternal destiny.

People are dissatisfied with philosophy, science, new thought - all these amount to nothing when you have a dead child in the house. These do not solace the troubles and woes of the world. They will tell you that, when they were sick and the door of the future was opening in their face, the only comfort they could find was in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christianity is the only sympathetic religion that ever came into the world, for it is the only religion that ever came from God.

Take your scientific consolation into a room where a mother has lost her child. Try your doctrine of the survival of the fittest with that broken-hearted woman. Tell her that the child that died was not as fit to live as the one left alive. Where does that scientific junk lift the burden from her heart? Go to some dying man and tell him to pluck up courage for the future. Try your philosophy on him; tell him to be confident in the great to be and the everlasting what is it. Go to that widow and tell her it was a geological necessity for her husband to croak. Tell her that in fifty million years we will all be scientific mummies on a shelf - petrified specimens of an extinct race. What does all this stuff get her? After you have gotten through with your science, philosophy, psychology, eugenics, social service, sociology, evolution, protoplasm, and fortuitous concurrence of atoms, if she isn't bug-house, I will take the Bible and read God's promise, and pray - and her tears will be dried and her soul flooded with calmness like a California sunset.

Is the church drawing the hungry world to its tables? There is no dodging or blinking or pussy-footing the fact that in drawing the hungry world to her tables, the church is facing a crisis. That there is a chasm between the church and the masses no one denies. If the gain of the church on the population is represented by eighty during the past thirty years, during the last twenty years it is represented by four, and during the past ten years it is represented by zero. The birth rate is going on a limited express while the "new birth" rate is going by way of freight.

Need the world turn to other tables than those of the church for spiritual food? Jesus said, "They need not depart; give ye them to eat." The church has the power and the food with which to feed the hungry world. It can feed the spiritual hunger of the world by doing what Jesus did when he fed the five thousand.

By a wise use of what it has on hand with the blessing of God upon it...

What has the church on hand with which to feed the hungry world!

It has two things:

A set of principles which if put into practice in the life of the individual and society and business and politics will solve every difficulty and problem of city, state, nation, and the world. There is no safer or saner method to settle all the world's problems than by the Sermon on the Mount. These principles are truth, justice, and purity. It has a person who has the power to create and make powerful these principles in the lives of men and women and that person is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Many skeptics have said, "Bill, if you will only preach the principles of Christianity instead of the Person, we will find no fault with you." Nothing doing, old top! Wherever a preacher or a church preaches a set of principles without the person Jesus Christ, that ministry, that church becomes sterile and powerless.

Truth is never powerful unless wrapped up in a person. I take truth and wrap it up in Christ and say, "Take it!" You say, "Give me truth but no Christ." Then you will be lost. You are not saved by truth but by the person Jesus Christ. Why take truth and reject Christ when it's Christ that inspires truth?

I take justice and wrap Christ up with it and say, "Here, take it." You say, "I will take justice. I deal squarely in business, pay my debts, give labor a square deal; I take justice but not your Christ." You are lost. Why take justice and cast Christ away when it is Christ that inspires justice.

I take purity and wrap it up with Jesus and say, "Here, take this." You say, "I will take the principle purity but not the person Jesus Christ." Then you are lost, for it is Christ that saves, not the principle of purity. "One thing thou lackest," the person Jesus.

Other religions have preached good things, but they have no Savior who can take these things and implant them in the human heart and make them grow. All other religions are built around principles, but the Christian religion is built around a person Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior. Every other religion on earth is a religion you must keep, but the Christian religion saves you, keeps you, and presents you faultless before his throne.

Oh, Christians! Have you any scars to show that you have fought in this conflict with the devil? When a war is over, heroes have scars to show; one rolls back his sleeve and shows a gunshot wound; another pulls down his collar and shows a wound on the neck; another says, "I never had use of that leg since Gettysburg"; another says, "I was wounded and gassed at the Marne in France." Christ has scars to show - scars on his brow, on his hands, on his feet, and when he pulls aside his robes of royalty, there will be seen the scar on his side.

When the Scottish chieftains wanted to raise an army, they would make a wooden cross, set it on fire and carry it through the mountains and the highlands among the people and wave the cross of flame and the people would gather beneath the standard and fight for Scotland. I come out with the cross of the son of God - it is a flaming cross, flaming with suffering, flaming with triumph, flaming with victory, flaming with glory, flaming with salvation for a lost world!

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