

'Five Loaves and Two Fishes' Ch. 6:1-21

by Charles Alexander

The feeding of the five thousand is a significant miracle that shows Jesus' power and love for His people, and it teaches us that He is the Bread of Life and the source of spiritual nourishment.

Scripture: Psalm 107:23, Ezekiel 21:6, Matthew 15:32, Mark 8:1, Mark 8:22, John 6:33

Topics: "Christ's Miracles", "New Covenant"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher delves into the significance of the miracles of the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on water in the Gospel of John, emphasizing the teaching nature of Christ's miracles carefully selected in John's Gospel. The feeding of the five thousand symbolizes Christ as the Bread of Life, while the walking on water displays His divine power and control over all things. The preacher also highlights the connection between these miracles and the Old Testament, particularly Elisha's miracle in 2 Kings 4, to reveal the profound lessons being taught about the New Covenant and the time of Christ's kingdom. The sermon further explores the feeding of the four thousand, the healing of the deaf and speechless man, and the blind man in Mark's Gospel, illustrating the rejection of Israel and the transition to the New Covenant.

Transcript

We should expect a very special purpose in the recording in the Gospel of John of the great miracle of the feeding of the five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes. We have seen that in John the miracles of Christ are carefully selected because of their teaching nature, and that they consist of the sacred number seven, leaving out the special post-resurrection-miracle recorded in the last chapter of the Gospel.

In the other gospels, too, the recorded miracles are designed to teach, but the plan and purpose are specially obvious in the Fourth Gospel. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels, and this invests it with an outstanding significance. We are not surprised, therefore, that John, writing long after the other evangelists as we believe, should devote to it so much attention and show how it becomes the basis for our Lord's transcendent address on Himself as the Bread of Life.

A further proof of the very special importance of this miracle is furnished in the obvious connection it has with a highly significant Old Testament miracle. We refer, of course, to Elisha's miracle recorded in 2 Kings 4:42-44. It is regrettable that so many commentators, ancient and modern, have given such scant attention to the connection of the two miracles, and this only confirms our fears that for the most part the

commentators are too much given to following the footprints of those who have gone before them, thus adding little or nothing to the stock of knowledge.

It was a time of dearth in Israel when Elisha came to Gilgal, where there was a settlement of the prophets. God granted these holy men a gracious token that the famine had lifted and that prosperity and abundance were returning to the earth. There came a man from Baal-Shalisha bringing "bread of the firstfruits," twenty loaves of barley and full ears of corn in the husk. At Elisha's command, this scant supply was set before one hundred men, who not only ate and were satisfied, but left thereof. It is hardly necessary to point out that the term "loaves" does not bear the common English meaning. These loaves, like those which the Lord broke, were small things, more like what the English call a "roll."

The similarity of the two miracles becomes almost startling the further comparison proceeds. Elisha fed one hundred men; the Lord fed one hundred companies at a time, each company numbering fifty men. Mark tells us that the Lord commanded the 5,000 to sit down by companies on the green grass, "and they sat down in ranks by hundreds and by fifties" (that is, one hundred companies of fifty each)

(Mark 6:39-40; Luke 9:14).

The fact that the miracle of Gilgal is repeated in the New Testament and magnified; beyond all proportion so that 100 men become 100 companies of men of fifty each shows that a great purpose was being served and a great lesson taught. The lesson was that the time of the New Covenant was come. Elisha belonged to the Old Testament; though in his special office he clearly foreshadowed the Savior and the coming of the gospel. The magnifying of the miracle on such a scale showed that the time had come when to the whole world would be given the bread of life sent down from heaven. When we come to the remainder of the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, we discover that this is precisely what our Lord is showing.

The language employed is the same in substance:

ELISHA CHRIST

"Give unto the people that they may eat" (Mark 6:13).

THE SERVANT ANDREW

"What, should I set this before them? What are they among so many?" (John 6:9)

The miracles exhibit other features which are highly significant. The Gilgal miracle took place at the time of the firstfruits (see 2 Kings 4:42), or Pentecost. That of the Lord took place about the time of Passover, fifty days before Pentecost. (See John 6:4), Old Testament and New Testament therefore combine to teach concerning the Lord's miracle that Passover and Pentecost, the crucifixion and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the whole salvation of sinful man, was the work of Christ and that the time was now at hand. John is careful to tell us in his account that there was much grass in the place (John 6:10)--a sentence which has puzzled many as having no real relevance because it indicated that it was springtime. The grass was green (Mark 6:39). The detail is, marvelous. The winter of man's sinful history was ended. The time of the

singing of birds was come. The new song of redemption was about to fill the earth with melody and rejoicing. All was precisely arranged by sovereign providence, for this was "the fulness of the time"

(Gal. 4:4).

The Gilgal miracle was designed to be a pointer to the fulness of provision to be made by Christ in the gospel, and further was to be a means of identifying to the Jewish nation the true Messiah and the time of His kingdom. The nation rejected the sign, spurned the Messiah, doted on an earthly kingdom, and repudiated the spiritual nature of the prophecies. Their error is followed only too closely by many good Christian men and commentators today, with the consequent impoverishment of the Church.

The miracle of Christ indicated that the time had come when to the whole world would be given the bread of life sent down from heaven: gentiles would come to the light shining from Zion's hill and kings to the brightness of that uprising.

This is precisely what our Lord was doing. He presented Himself to the people as the bread of life sent down from heaven and in doing so abolished Jewish prerogative and privilege forever in the words, "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven AND GIVETH LIFE UNTO THE WORLD" (John 6:33). He came not merely for an earthly nation, but for a people who should be gathered from all peoples, nations, and languages from all the ends of the earth and to the uttermost limits of time.

The people who ate the loaves and fishes were willing to make Him king, but only as they interpreted the mission of Messiah in the terms in which that mission was customarily explained in the synagogues. They looked for an earthly kingdom, earthly prosperity, and the luxury of eating bread for which they rendered no return. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled" (John 6:26).

It is well to be reminded of the nature and purpose of all miracles. Miracles are signs of the creative power and authority of God. Let none ever try to explain away a miracle. Plausible explanations of how some miracle might have been performed by natural means and laws, or by psycho logical impression, always founder on the great signs of walking on the water and raising the dead. Those persons are to be suspected who are so selective in their comments as to isolate things for which they think they can account by natural laws, from those which lie utterly beyond any such conjuration. This is altogether too easy a method of disposing of difficulties.

We accept miracles for what they are--tokens of the creative power of God: not working according to natural law but dispensing with natural law that Christ might show Himself to be the great Creator who produces life out of nothing. At the same time, the great work of redemption which He came to accomplish is illustrated. In the sequel to the miracle, Christ shows that the life of the world depends upon the giving of Himself to death: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood ye have no life in you" (John 6:53).

In these words He foretells His own death and mystically refers to saving faith, by which the benefits of that death are bestowed, as an eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood. To the further understanding of this, we shall have more to say later on.

WEAKEN THE MIRACLE AND YOU WEAKEN THE CONSOLATION

All the actions of the Lord are "word and doctrine." None of the recorded actions of the Savior in the four gospels is trivial or unimportant. This is clearly seen in the account of this miracle and its companion miracle of Christ walking on the sea.

The action begins with the passage of the Lord across the Sea of Galilee to the wilderness. Multitudes followed Him in the religious ferment caused by His miracles in the region of Capernaum. And seeing the great congregation gathered, the Lord "went up into a mountain" (a small eminence) and there sat with His disciples.

In Bible symbolism, a mountain or hill is always a kingdom. The going of Christ up to the summit of the eminence was formal. It was symbolic of the establishing of His kingdom of grace with the twelve apostles around Him, who were to be the viceroys of that gospel kingdom over which they would reign on their thrones of apostolic authority and ministry of the Word from the time of Pentecost till the Second Advent. We have a similar action in the case of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1).

To His humble enthronement on the hill came the multitudes, symbolic of that great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, kindreds, people and tongues (Revelation 7:9) which should come to Him in the course of time to receive at His hands, through the ministry of the apostles and through all those since who are faithful to the apostolic doctrine, THE BREAD OF LIFE, the food of the soul, the unsearchable riches of Christ in His atoning Work and glorious impartation of Himself as the source and head of the new creation.

Luke adds the information that throughout that day the Lord "spake to them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing" (Luke 9:11). This is very significant and adds to the formal nature of the Lord's action in exhibiting thus the nature of that kingdom He came to set up, so different from that which the people had been taught by the rabbis to expect.

"HE KNEW WHAT HE WOULD DO"

The day wears on, and the disciples, still ignorant of the significance of what was taking place, became anxious lest the vast throng, far from material aid, should come to mischief. Christ asks Philip, the Bethsaida Jew with the gentile name, whence bread could be bought. The question was intended to 'prove' Philip--to show how the future of the Kingdom of God was a thing of faith--for "he himself knew what he would do."

We pause to note that the Lord's words go far beyond the temporal provision that day for the hungry thousands who stood around. Here is eternal Wisdom, which arranges all situations in order to display its omniscience, its limitless power, its anticipation of all situations. He knew what He would do from before the foundation of the world. Eternal Wisdom is never taken by surprise, never descends to improvisation, is not dependent upon the demands of changing circumstances, is never confronted by anything new. All is known from the beginning, and known because Wisdom is in possession from all eternity of all the facts, all the causes and all the consequences. Nor is Wisdom an idle prescience ('a knowing beforehand') of events not necessarily under its immediate control. Foreknowledge is foreordination when it is applied to deity. God is not the prisoner of His own foreknowing but the arbiter thereof; else there is no God, only ungovernable fate.

The only Being who can be entrusted with the origin and destiny of creation must be One who made all things for Himself, with the highest and most glorious end in view, and who has the power and resource to

see that all He intends and purposes is achieved at the last. Always and in all circumstances, the Eternal Word knows what He will do. In the case of the feeding of the multitude, the great end and design was to foretell the gospel, and all the subsequent discourse arising out of the miracle shows that the circumstances and the actors were purposefully assembled that day as a scenic preparation for the great event of the gospel--the reason for the creation of all things.

Philip's pathetic reply that two hundred pennyworth of bread would not suffice for the purpose is a significant reflection on the human wisdom which persists in limiting the divine power through its preoccupation with carnal resources.

The world was evangelized in one generation without finance or committees. The Reformation managed without money, and the Methodist awakening somehow got through without planning, central authority, or financial budgetry.

Today, good Christian men are telling us that a Millennium is due, in which the Jewish people will predominate, and Jewish evangelism will do more than the apostles ever did. One of the secrets of this success, say some excellent men, will be Jewish financial genius and control of the world's gold resources: "A general conversion of the Jews would throw an amount of wealth into the treasury of the Lord of which we now can have no conception." Our comment at the time this statement was given wide publicity was, "The Lord save us from this millennium in which yellow bullion will bulk large in the economy of salvation."

We are not saying that it is possible to carry on the work of churches and societies without monetary means, but we do protest against the emphasis often put upon the imperious value of money in the cause of Christ. He who approved the two mites of the widow and set a value thereon above all that the rich cast in showed thereby that heavy budgets are not the key to anything. The Spirit works where there are willing hearts and dedicated lives and humble worship. We have heard of good men giving away fortunes for evangelistic purposes and missionary causes, and their contempt for money is indeed to be applauded. What is not to be applauded is the publicity which is given to the grand gesture because of the size of the bag involved, when in heaven another standard of values is observed--giving that little out of poverty, which is valued supremely in heaven where a God who is in control of all the resources of the universe waits, not to ransack creation for material help in making the sacrifice of Christ effectual in salvation, but for willing hearts to worship and praise the unspeakable grace which has granted to a world beggared by sin and curse, the priceless merits of Christ.

JEWS WITH GENTILE NAMES

Andrew, the only other apostle with a gentile name, comes well into the picture here. He draws attention to the lad with the basket of food--five small barley loaves and two fishes. We like to think, though we cannot prove it, that Andrew was the only one around who recalled the miracle of Gilgal and humbly proffered the information, not as instructing divine wisdom what to do, but as a tentative suggestion: "But what are they among so many?" Well done, Andrew! "Here could be a solution, Lord, but it is not for me to dictate or even suggest." The prominence given to Andrew and Philip in this miracle indicates the predominant gentile (or world) interest in the work of Christ.

The internal evidences of this miracle satisfy us--if we needed satisfying--that the thing actually took place. Men inventing a story would not be so artless as to expose their own ignorance or write themselves so small, nor would they have thought of choosing two Jews with gentile names to be the spokesmen of the

occasion.

THE FIVE AND THE TWO

But five loaves and two fishes? What significance attaches to this detail? Long ago Augustine of North Africa, the greatest mind in the Christian Church after Paul, and the man the commentators seldom quote because they belong to schools which cannot understand by reason of their own affected scholasticism--Augustine, we say, long ago discerned the allegorical meaning of it all. "These five barley loaves," he said, "are the five books of Moses--Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy."

These books have always been known as the Law. They contain all the evidences and tokens and declarations of God's ancient covenant with His people. Moses was the mediator of that old covenant, in the types and shadows of which the New Testament was wrapped up, to be revealed when the fulness of the time should come and Christ in Person should follow His own shadow and in the full blaze of Gospel glory abolish the old that He might establish the new. Those five books of Moses contain not only the articles of the old covenant with its impossible demands upon the sinner and its merely typical provision of priests and sacrifices which could not take away sin; they contain also the priceless foreshadowing and promise of that New Testament which Christ sealed with His own blood and of which He spoke when He broke the bread ("This is my body"), and raised the brimming cup of wine, saying, "This is my blood of the New Covenant (Testament), shed for many for the remission of sins."

In those first five wonderful books of the Bible it is recorded how the Lord fed His people in the wilderness with manna sent down from heaven. Now in a portion of that same wilderness (for the miracle of the five loaves was performed beyond Jordan in the wilderness) stands the One Who gave the people that manna, and now proclaims in the sequel to the miracle of the five loaves that Moses gave not bread from heaven, those who ate it being long since dead, but the Father now gave the true bread from heaven which a man might eat thereof and never die. That bread of God was His own flesh which He would give for the life of the world.

The five loaves, therefore, are the token of the New Testament. Augustine is not so happy over the two small fishes which went with the loaves, and we endeavor to supply what his spiritual genius did not clearly discern, in our suggestion that as fish enter prominently into the mystery of the Church, so the two fishes indicate the nature of that Church. We do so with the more boldness because the Lord had foretold that his apostles would be fishers of men, and He purposely chose many of them from the occupation of fishermen. At least seven of them were fishermen, as we find in the last chapter of John in that much misunderstood episode of the post-resurrection catching of the great draught of fishes--one hundred and fifty three. Alas! For those preachers who can see only the apostolic exercise only a departure from the will of God by men reverting sinfully to their old occupation. This false and ignorant exegesis is exposed immediately by two facts--the number of the disciples (the perfect seven, indicating the sacred nature of the action) and the precise number of the catch. When we come to expound that miracle, we will be able to explain the significance of the number 153. Further, it is inconceivable that the Lord would grace with a miracle the alleged backsliding of His followers and thus endorse their unbelief. No, the disciples in their fishing fulfilled not their own will but the will of Christ who designed to prepare them for their immediate task.

If fish denote the nature of the Church and the manner of the ingathering of the elect, why then should two fishes be required? The answer is plain-- that two is always the signature of the Church in her position in

relation to the two covenants. Two was the signature of the two covenants in the family of Abraham as we see in Paul's divinely inspired commentary (Galatians 4: 22-31) on the TWO SONS OF ABRAHAM, Ishmael and Isaac. Jacob at Mahanaim ("The Two Companies") received the vision of the two hosts of God in their protecting mission over the Church (Genesis 32:1-3). The name Mahanaim is well remembered in the inspired scriptures in the Song of Solomon 6:13--"What will ye see in the Shulamite (the bride, or the church)? As it were the company of two armies (margin, Mahanaim)."

This enigmatic statement is understood only when it is associated with Jacob's vision. The bride (Shulamith, the Hebrew feminine form for Solomon) is the Church of Christ in whom we see the company of two armies. This is a valuable corrective to the false Dispensationalism which tells us the Church is entirely and exclusively a New Testament body of limited duration--a theory which has done untold damage to the understanding of Holy Scripture. The two companies or armies seen in the Church are the Old Testament saints in the long ages of preparation when the Church was in its minority under the tutors and governors of the Law (Galatians 4:1-2), and then in her full majority as the heir come-of-age, in whom all the promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled. The Church is the true Shulamite (Shulamith), the bridal-queen of the heavenly Solomon whose name she bears; her two-fold history indicates that she is one in Old Testament and New Testament and that therefore the New Testament Church is the true object of prophecy, the legitimate heir to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the consummation of the divine purpose, the true and only Israel.

The 5,000 are marshaled into their 100 companies of fifty; they are sat down upon the green grass denoting the springtime of the Church after the long winter of Old Testament waiting, and now the Lord takes the loaves and breaks them. The breaking is not recorded in John whose object was to fill out that which had not been previously recorded. But Matthew, Mark and Luke each tell us that the Lord first broke the bread and then gave to His disciples, who in turn gave to the people.

The bread is the bread of life, the doctrine of Christ, as we find in the remainder of the chapter, and the breaking of the bread is the understanding of that Word. The eating is the receiving by faith.

THE APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

We pause here to see a marvelous portrayal of divine truth. The position of the apostles between the Lord and the multitude is of very great moment.

The doctrine of Christ is the apostolic doctrine. By the decree of God, twelve men were ordained as the patriarchs of the Church, just as the twelve sons of Jacob were the patriarchs of the Old Testament Church. To the apostles--and to them alone--the Lord commits His Word. It is to apostolic authority we must look for the understanding of the entire field of divine truth revealed. What they did not write and teach is not authority. Those who have in many an age since claimed to be apostles are liars (Revelation 2:2). There is no new, no other revelation, but the writings of the apostles. It is highly significant that with the exception of the historical books--Mark, Luke, and Acts, which were written in association with the apostles and by their authority--all the New Testament, all the purely doctrinal parts, were the work of apostles. The Epistle to the Hebrews (not really an epistle at all, but the purest form of theological writing in the whole of the Bible) must have been written by an apostle, and that apostle must have been Paul. The shifting speculations of the theologians to find some other writer than Paul are not only condemned by their own contradictions of each other and the absurd, sometimes wild, speculations as to who else the author could be, but in fact transgress the rule of apostolic authority, which requires that all doctrine must

proceed from the apostles and in fact does and did so proceed. Hebrews, of all books, could be no exception.

Christ lays down the apostolic principle that through these men the New Testament word should come; the twelve were to "sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of the children of Israel"--a scripture which we have said times without number is a figure of the gospel reign of the apostles over the Church, and not an earthly jurisdiction in a temporal millennium when allegedly the apostles return from the enjoyment of immortality in the next world to rule over a mixture of mortals and immortals in the land of Palestine.

In their reign, the apostles preside now over the mystic tribes of the spiritual Israel, the Church, and they reign by their written word, which is the only authority the true Church will admit and receive. The thrones denote their authority. This is fundamental to the Kingdom of Christ, and it is shown by the action of the Savior in placing the broken bread in their hands to be distributed to the multitude. The figure does not end there as we shall presently see.

THE TWELVE BASKETS

The miracle may be envisaged thus: the Savior places the broken bread in the hand of each apostle. The twelve then proceed to the companies sitting on the grass and take from their hand a portion which they present to the first, then the second, then the third, and so forth. As much remains in their hand after distributing as was there at the first. The men to whom the bread is given begin to eat, but as much as they eat, they have as much remaining in their hands. Pieces fall to the ground, but there is no diminution of the amount of bread remaining in the hand of the eater. At last all are sufficed, and the ground is littered with the bread which remains.

The Savior commands that the fragments be gathered so that nothing is lost. Why does He command this? Not merely to advertise the greatness of the miracle. Something far more significant than that is being portrayed. Twelve baskets are procured and are in due course filled with the fragments. The apostles bear the load on their shoulders. What they afterwards do, with so great a quantity of bread we are not told; that is no part of the mystery. But see these men carrying away the bread. See them carrying it throughout history. All the bread of life we eat, brethren, comes from the apostolic baskets. These heavily laden men are setting out on a long journey which has already lasted near two thousand years. To all the world those baskets have been carried, and multitudes are being fed from them to this hour. The riches which are in Christ are unsearchable. His resources are inexhaustible. The more we partake of Christ, the more of Christ remains. Sufficient for the whole world or for ten thousand worlds, the fulness of Christ transcends description or measure. The apostolic baskets--the gospels, the epistles, the Revelation--are full of Christ. Woe to those preachers who, having such a supply available, bring out their rags of sermons at the weekly preaching, and the hungry are not fed. The bread of life is in rich supply, yet the preacher can scarcely muster enough resources to give even a crumb of Christ to the starving and the desolate.

These are the men very often who talk much about revival--that being their only hope for a better or easier discharge of their duties. There can be no such revival without a generation of preachers, and that we do not have. When the Lord gives the Word, great is the company of the preachers (as Mr. Handel sang so well from the Old Testament passage). Starvelings in the pulpit do not rouse among thinking men any redolent hopes of a new dawn. There will have to be some serious work done if ever there is to be a new awakening, and no one can honestly say there is any sign of it.

MILLENNIAL DREAM WORLD

There are good men who teach that in a coming age, which some call the millennium and others--more modest--refer to as the Latter Day Glory, preachers will suddenly spring into life all over the world and the world will be converted. It is a lazy man's millennium indeed. Sermons without tears, without study, without labor and travail, without learning and the steadfast pursuit of knowledge may suffice for the kind of dream world which many are expecting; but it strikes us as something very far removed from what the Holy Spirit has been wont to do throughout history.

These are days when the world was never so filled with Bibles. New translations, backed by high-power publicity, are appearing every year; and the rubbish of them, by the skilful management of Satan, is burying or obscuring the true sense of much of what the apostles and prophets wrote. More money is being spent than ever before on the promotion of "revivals"; and young men, highly personable, sometimes cultured, occasionally captivating, are ranging the earth in the pursuit of the religious El Dorado. Names appear and disappear, but the world moves with increasing momentum to its awful climax. Few are ready to learn the lessons, for the world of make-believe is much more attractive than the world of reality.

We urge upon Christian people everywhere, especially those engaged in preaching and the care of congregations, that they would be best employed in going to the apostles and learning from them through the Holy Spirit of the riches of Christ, so they will never be short of a theme. Preaching is the art of a lifetime, notwithstanding the supposed examples of a few exceptional men who appear to have learned more quickly than is normal. It would be well for us to disregard the exceptional and think of ourselves as poor ordinary creatures, who, without exceptional labor, can never sustain a ministry adequate to the glory of the Redeemer.

As Christ must first break the loaves, we are taught that it is only through those ever-blessed hands that the bread of life can be distributed. The truth does not come even from the apostles, but from Him who Himself broke the bread and who through the ministry of the apostles still breaks the loaves, opening to us the concealed treasures of the Covenant, showing us with what confidence we may take and eat of Him and live for ever. In the discourse which follows the miracle, the Lord shows in advance the meaning of His own death and lays bare all the wonder of the atonement and all the grace of the Spirit which He sheds forth upon His Church. All wisdom is contained in this wonderful miracle.

We reserve a thought for the lad who carried the basket containing the loaves and fishes. That lad was Israel after the flesh; he represented the Old Testament nation to whom were committed the oracles of God. As he carried but did not eat, so Israel, the channel through which the Word of God came, did not believe that Word; and when He who was that Word came to them, they rejected and crucified Him.

PREDESTINATION AND FREEDOM

Those who will attend to these things will not fail to be impressed with the mystery of divine providence--predestination. In that profound mystery of God's sovereign working, all its agents act freely. The people assemble in the precise numbers required. The lad brings his basket replenished with the exact number of loaves and fishes. Without feeling of compulsion, each obeying the free inclination of his disposition, all nevertheless are secretly impelled to do whatever they did in accordance with a holy plan, the object of which was the divine glory in the preparation and execution of GLORIOUS REDEMPTION.

So at the crucifixion of Christ, this was the hour of wicked men and of the power of darkness. Judas, Herod, Pilate,, the chief priests and rulers, of the people, and finally the common people themselves were united in the freedom of a common purpose, to shed the blood of the Beloved. Yet behind them was the sinister power of the Evil One to whom liberty was granted in that hour to work his will in venom and hate against God and against His Christ. Before the Judgment Seat all will be guilty and speechless when arraigned for their crime. They acted freely, and their conscience will speak only too loudly for God and truth in that day. Yet above and beyond it all, it was the sovereign will of God which on that awful day assembled the witnesses and brought about that event upon which redemption depended. The Jews were animated by Satan, and Satan himself was the agent of divine providence, as is declared in the words of Acts 2:23, "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Again we read:

For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before-to be done (Acts 4:27-28).

The powers of evil are shackled to the throne of God so that in the end only one will is supreme in the universe, that of God Almighty and All-Wise. If it were otherwise, then there would be more Gods than one in creation, and Satan's end and design would have been achieved. The Sovereign Lord of All must in the end carry out all He ever set out to do, and those, who deny divine predestination can succeed in their philosophy only by substituting the will of man for the will of God (or worse, substituting the will of the Evil One).

Divine predestination does not imply any impairment of moral agency. The integrity of the human soul (and Satan's dark spirit likewise, for that matter) is carefully safeguarded, yet in the depths of the divine wisdom, where no unhallowed judgment can enter, He who lives in the Eternal Moment

and who has no history either past or future, who is the beginning, and the end within Himself, works all things after the counsel of His own will, and none is able to stay His hand or say unto Him, "What doest thou?"

Righteous Job learned this profound lesson on behalf of all the righteous. God's answer to Job's complaints against the holy providence of God was not by way of a vindication--for God is not obliged to give to give an account of His doings--but by way of the exhibition of His immeasurable wisdom and omnipotent-power in the bringing forth of creation, in the inauguration and control and destiny of the starry galaxies, and in the ceaseless providence by which all life is sustained, whether of man or animal, angel or devil. God came to Job in the whirlwind (Job-38:1) and spoke to him through that immense display of His power in the terrifying and all-destroying energy of one of natures grandest manifestations, to show puny man that he is not capable of understanding or withstanding the processes of the holy and awful power and will of God. It is enough, as it was enough for Job, to bow before the divine prerogative and, in lowly faith in the perfection of the divine nature, to prostrate intellect, even reason itself, before Deity, and declare:

I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but how mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor

myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

(Job 42:2-6).

Did we say reason itself is prostrated before God? Perhaps a wiser saying would be that this is reason at its greatest and highest and holiest--when, as in Job, wrung by trial and purged by the cross, it proclaims the righteousness of God and speaks for Him.

CHRIST REFUSES AN EARTHLY KINGDOM

The miracle of the loaves and fishes is followed immediately by another which proclaims in its mysterious depths a new aspect of Christ's sovereignty: HE WALKS UPON THE SEA. Let no one suppose that the only purpose of this miracle was to demonstrate the Lord's command over wind and wave. He intended to teach a profound spiritual lesson. But first,

When Jesus therefore perceived that, they would come and take him by force to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone (John 6:15).

There is a strange dispensational theory current among the people of God today that Christ 'offered' His kingdom to the Jews, but they refused it; the kingdom was therefore postponed and at the end of the 'church period' (so-called) it will be given to Israel (not offered) by the personal appearance of Christ from heaven, come down on earth to reign.

This theory could have gained currency only in an age such as ours when preaching and the holy art of exposition of the scriptures are at their lowest ebb since the Reformation.

The people who witnessed the miracle of the loaves and fishes said, when it was over, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (John 6:14). They were ready to acclaim Him as their Messiah. This was the great moment for Him to accept their acclaim and to become their King. Yet we find Him departing from them on this very account. We beg our readers to see that it was not the Jews who rejected the kingdom, but Christ who rejected them. He did so because their conception of the kingdom was false. They had the illusion of national glory and Israelitish restoration and had yet to learn that Christ's kingdom is not of this world.

We are pained to have to repeat for the sake of our readers, again and again, that it is this same false theory of the kingdom which lies at the root of the false prophetic teaching so rife amongst us today and which has done more than any other single factor to destroy Bible exposition by inhibiting the use of the Old Testament prophets. Christ's kingdom is entirely spiritual, having no relevance to nationality, genealogy, privilege, or earthly grandeur. It is, as Paul tells us in Galatians (and elsewhere in his epistles), a kingdom not of this world, but one of faith and patience and suffering and enduring, a kingdom in which there is neither Jew nor gentile, but all are one in Christ Jesus. Not until it is perceived that this is the meaning of the prophecies and promises in the Old Testament, can there be a return to the full preaching of the Word of God. Till that moment of divine favor returns to us, we must continue to be beset by these crippling interpretations, which are borrowed from Jewish sources, and endure the present famine of the Word of God.

We return to our exposition of this portion of the gospel story, which tells us of the events which ensued upon CHRIST'S REFUSAL TO BE A KING ON THIS EARTH.

We attend to the purpose of John, always made plain in the writing of His gospel, that he should prove in all he wrote the absolute deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. What miracle more tied up with Old Testament figure and statement, and more calculated to display the absolute omnipotence of Christ, than this of the walking upon the water, the calming of the raging wind and sea, and the safe arrival of the ship on the other side? The omnipotence, the creative prerogatives of Christ, are graphically displayed. All events, both natural and providential, are seen to be under His control. He turns all the pages of history according to His own will, as this miracle further makes plain.

This was the intention of the Apostle John as he sets down his record of that great event which happened in his own personal history, because he was in the boat at the time. Strange to say, he does not give so long an account as Matthew and Mark. He seems to abbreviate it. He does not tell us of how Peter, at the bidding of Christ, casts himself into the water to walk upon it as the Savior did, and then, overwhelmed by the terror of the storm, begins to sink. The Savior takes his hand to save him from the waters, with the words, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Let those who ascribe to Peter an eminence he cannot bear learn that not the hand of Peter, but the omnipotent hand of Christ alone, can save. The ship with Christ and Peter and the rest safely aboard reaches the other side in safety, and the disciples acclaim the Lord--"Of a truth thou art the Son of God."

It is not the inspired purpose of John to record these details. It was sufficient for his purpose to present to us a picture of the Lord in control of all things. Even as Man, He did not cease to be God and was in control of all the powers of creation. All time and all purpose remained His. We must see Him thus if we would be comforted and at peace. How many times in history the people of God have had reason to be thankful for this account of the Lord's walking upon the waves of the sea! We encounter many such situations in life, and we are encouraged to know He walks upon the waves and is sufficient for every demand made upon Him. How often in life's changing circumstances He declares to us, "It is I. Be not afraid!"

Refusing to be made an earthly king, the Savior sends His disciples on ahead in their vessel while He ascends alone a mountain overlooking the scene "to pray" (says Matthew). We have seen that a mountain symbolizes a kingdom, authority, power. As darkness closes in, He continues in prayer, our Mediator-Man, God and Man, replenishing His human soul in communion with the inexhaustible fulness of the Father, whose commission He bears. He advances to the throne of His glory upon His knees and later under the weight of His cross. This is the only path to His kingdom and the only way it can be established.

The ascent into the mountain signifies His ascent to heaven when His task on earth is accomplished. The vessel containing the twelve apostles pursues its way across the waves. It is overtaken by violent storm. That vessel is the Church, and her crewmen are the Twelve by whose doctrine the Church is navigated across the stormy seas of time. The five and twenty or thirty furlongs which covered the time up to when the stormy headwind stopped all further progress is the indefinite point reached by the vessel at any time in history, for none can tell how far we have come or how near we may be to the other side. All that is known is what the apostles knew--we are in the midst of the sea (Mark 6:17).

The interceding Lord, from the elevation of His eternal throne, sees in the darkness their plight. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him. "If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me: even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not, from thee, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (Psalm 139:11-12).

The great wind which arose is the wind of adversity by which the Lord tries the faith of His people and tempers their dependence upon Him. The apostles were but men, however favored by divine authority and revelation, and no more than we, were capable of overcoming life's trials. As with them, so with us, the lesson of the Lord's faithfulness and constancy, His omniscient eye and omnipotent power to deliver, are paramount. The Church proceeds in her age-long voyage through the night of this world's, sin and the angry billows of opposition and persecution immune from disaster because He is on the throne of His kingdom and cannot fail. At all times He knows what He will do.

It is the fourth watch of the night--the darkest hour before the dawn, when men's hearts fail them in weariness and in fear. He walks upon the water. They see His godlike form treading down the tumult of the waves. He makes as though He will pass by them (Mark 6:48). They think they see a spirit and cry out for fear. "They all saw Him and were troubled" (Mark 6:50).

Man fears the supernatural. None are more superstitious as a rule than those who boast they do not believe in the supernatural. Even the Christian shrinks from the awful grandeur of that which is eternal. In the presence, of the angel, Daniel--one of the greatest of us all--becomes as one dead. John the Apostle, of all men, seeing a symbolic vision of Christ in His glory, likewise falls at the feet of Him in whose bosom he once laid his head - "as one dead" (Revelation.1:17). Our dread of the supernatural springs from sin. Peter felt it when on another occasion while crossing the lake the sleeping Lord arises and rebukes the wind and the waves. Confronted by the tokens of the Lord's majesty, Peter cries, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

Faith alone grasps the eternal and triumphs over guilt and death. He who called across the water, "IT IS I, BE NOT AFRAID," says to the inspired John, "I AM HE that liveth and was dead..." (Revelation 1:18). "It is I" and "I am He" are identical in meaning. Why should we fear death and the grave and shrink from the holy light of His face when He speaks to us in syllables so sweet and gracious? We dread that which we desire most. We approach reluctantly the brink of the last river we all must cross. When the night grows dark and the waters rise, we look for the dawn yet fear its approach. We need something more than we appear to have. It is at that time that He comes in Person, with His "Be of good cheer. It is I; Be not afraid."

They willingly receive Him into the ship, and immediately the ship is at the land whither they go (John 6:21). Some have tried to say the ship was almost there anyway; and the breaking of the day revealed the proximity of the shore. They read too much into the account. John is specific, and the 'natural' explanation will not sustain the weight of testimony from the combined accounts in Matthew, Mark, and John. The ship was in the midst of the sea. John's furlongs (John 6:19) leave the vessel as far from one shore as the other. The wind was contrary. They toiled in vain to make progress. It was the admission of the Savior, to the ship that brought the frail vessel at once to haven. The moment He enters ours, we shall be in, the port of heaven beholding the ineffable glory. And the moment of His Second Advent, the Church will have completed her tempestuous voyage and all at once will be at rest.

"THEY THAT GO DOWN TO THE SEA IN SHIPS"

It is impossible to ignore the fact that the underlying Old Testament scripture anticipating it all is Psalm 107:23-31. The Lord was deliberately and intentionally giving a divine commentary on those graphic words describing the perils of the great deep:

They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves

hereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because, they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works: to the children of men! (Psalm 107:23-31)

The mariners in this great passage are the apostles and their successors, who 'do business in great waters.' If any should have any doubt whether the Lord intends in this psalm to illustrate the voyage of the elect people through this world of sin and trial, let them read the opening verses: "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so...."

The Lord shows both in the psalm and in the gospel that the storm which all His people encounter in life is raised by His own providence so that His people may learn to trust and praise Him in their distresses. "He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind which lifteth up the waves thereof."

That storm and disquiet in your OWN life, O troubled Christian man, is raised and commanded by the omnipotence of the Savior for your blessing and your deliverance. It is glorious to know that the psalm does not merely refer to the average voyage across the Atlantic Ocean or some other of the Seven Seas. It has to do with our lives in the home and at work. His deliverances issue in our praises, as we so express ourselves: "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt Him also in the congregations of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the elders" (Psalm 107:31-32).

It is surely glorious to know that no storm can ever arise against our frail vessel which He has not sent, and He who commands the storm controls what He commands. He treads upon the waves of the sea and rides upon the wings of the storm.

If we are not yet convinced that in all the details of His earthly life the Lord was treading on prophetic territory, let Job 9:8 suffice to show that our Lord in walking on the water was purposely showing to His disciples His own divine nature and declaring His own omnipotence: "Which alone spreadeth out the heavens and treadeth upon the waves of the sea."

Unless He had raised the waves by a great storm He could never have given His disciples this divine commentary on Job 9 and Psalm 107. Is it true that Job in that chapter is declaring the absolute sovereignty of God, His wisdom and almighty strength?

Which removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the stars. Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south. Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number (Job 9:5-10).

It is enough to know that it is He who raises the storm. That fact being established, all complaining is stilled. It is only by this that we can learn that He walks upon the stormy waves and controls all things, including the mighty orbs which shine in the night sky and symbolize His power and glory. The trials by which we learn are not pleasing things. No chastening is pleasant, but grievous. Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby (Hebrews 12:11). And we

now know our God and know our Christ: "He treadeth upon the waves of the sea."

Solomon joins in telling us this same glorious truth: "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in his fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?"

(Proverbs 30:4). Again, in Psalm 77:19, "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known."

Who can trace the path of the Almighty or mark out the way His feet have taken?

God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform.

He plants His footsteps in the sea.

And rides upon the storm.

Again, Psalm 65:7, "He stilleth the noise of the sea, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people." He walks upon the waves of history and brings His Church through it all to the heavenly harbor at the last.

HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN

As we have now observed, the symbolism of the double account of the feeding of the five thousand and the miracle of the walking upon the sea is a divine marvel. Lest any should still be doubtful of attaching so great significance to the details of the action, we mention one conclusive fact gathered from John's account, a fact which has not commonly been perceived by most of the commentators.

In that enlargement of the two companion miracles which John alone gives, namely, the long discourse by Christ on Himself as the Bread of Life, there is a sevenfold declaration that HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN to bestow Himself as the life of the world. See John 6: 33, 38; 41, 42, 50, 51, and 58.

That 'coming down from heaven' is symbolized in the twice recorded action of the Savior in coming down from the mount; first to minister to the people, and, secondly to deliver the disciples from the raging of the sea and bring their vessel safely to port. These are the two comings of Christ; the two Advents. The first advent was His coming down from heaven to redeem and save His people by the giving of Himself as the Bread of Life; the second will be His coming down from heaven to deliver His people from all the perils and trials of a sinful and hostile world and bring His completed Church to "the other side," to "the land whither they went," even to the heavenly country which they seek. Though for most, that journey has been completed anyway as they have passed by death from this troubled scene to the eternal home, there is a fuller sense in which the second advent will not only bring to an end the age-long voyage of the Church through time, but will through the resurrection of the body unite in one blessed moment and for the first time the entire host of the redeemed in their final state of glory:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Apostles, prophets, martyrs, fathers, Christians of every age and language and nation: shall unite in that one blissful moment to proclaim the final victory over death and the grave. "The last enemy which shall be destroyed is death." Not until the resurrection day will this be realized. Meantime, the righteous dead are with their Lord in conscious and unmingled bliss, waiting till the sufferings and trials of their brethren which are upon the earth are "fulfilled" (Revelation 6:11). This, believe it or not, is "the first resurrection" of Revelation 20:5--the souls of the righteous in heaven, already delivered from death and enjoying the firstfruits of their triumph, but awaiting that second or final resurrection of the body which will take place for all of every generation, at one time, at the Second Advent of Christ, when He shall "come down from heaven" in like manner as He was seen to go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND

We cannot leave our analysis of the miracle of the loaves and fishes without referring to the similar miracle of the Feeding of the Four Thousand with seven loaves and an unspecified number of fishes ("a few small fishes") recorded only in Matthew 15:32-39 and Mark 8:1-9. The repetition of the, miracle on a smaller scale so soon after the earlier one has emboldened the critics to allege that this is a case in proof of their theory that the gospels are of late date and derived from earlier accounts long since lost. To say the least, these easy theories have nothing to commend them from the standpoint of honest and careful exegesis, though their plausibility is much to the taste of the ignorant who are never so ready as when instruments are at hand to carve up revealed truth and carry the severed head into their ungodly theological feasts, like John the Baptist's head, on a charger.

A true exegete will not be long in perceiving that all the elements of a new and predetermined lesson are here. The number seven, sacred to the divine mysteries, is prominent. The Savior Himself gives a telling commentary on the two miracles in observations which immediately follow the record of the second miracle. The Lord warns His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The men reason among themselves that He is referring to the fact that they have no bread with them. The Lord rebukes them and demands:

Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? (See Matthew 16:6-12).

They then perceived that the Lord was referring to the doctrine taught by the Pharisees and Sadducees.

We return to the miracle of the seven loaves and the four thousand people, and observe that the sacred seven is the sign of completeness and perfection. If the five loaves of the first miracle denoted the new covenant of grace as that covenant was hidden and foreshadowed in the old covenant of Moses with its Five Books, so the seven loaves of the second miracle must denote the Church of the new covenant in her sevenfold completeness, as in those Seven Churches of Asia (Revelation 1-3), which can only be understood of the sevenfold completeness of the Church in history. The unspecified number of fishes as contrasted with the two of the first miracle can only signify that whereas in the two fishes we have in view the Church under her two historic covenants of Old and New Testaments, in the second miracle we are entirely in the region of the New Testament Church, separated at last from that false Judaism represented by "the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."

In the four thousand people of the second miracle is likewise revealed the same imagery. Four is the number of creation (e.g., the four corners of the earth, the four winds of heaven, etc.) and denotes the worldwide nature of the gospel kingdom, gathering together its mystic four thousand from all lands and peoples and from all ages.

The procession of the chapters 14 through 16 of Matthew (in which the two miracles occur) should be studied to understand the unfolding of the divine purpose in the gospel.

The series of events begins with the martyrdom of John the Baptist, which, though the immediate responsibility of Herod, a non-Jew, was nevertheless the crime of the Israelitish people who had already rejected the testimony of John to the coming of the Messiah.

It was the news of the death of John which moved the Savior to depart by ship to the 'desert place' where the first miracle of the five loaves was performed (Matthew 14:13). We have already shown how this miracle marks the passage of the Church from her servitude under the old (Jewish) covenant to the new covenant of gospel grace in Christ, the Bread of Life sent down from heaven.

Chapter 15 of Matthew records the controversy of the Lord with the Pharisees over the washing of hands, His subsequent departure from the land of Israel altogether, to the regions of Tyre and Sidon, the healing of the daughter of the Canaanitish woman, and the return to Galilee, where He feeds the four thousand.

The entire action of this chapter exposes the degeneracy of Judaism and foreshadows the rise of that new "nation" of Jew and gentile, which was shortly to take the place of the rejected Israel. The doctrine of the Pharisees, with their vain regulations regarding handwashing while ignoring the need for heart purity, is exposed. The Jewish zeal for outward performances of rituals, whether authorized or invented, to the neglect of mercy, compassion, reverence and inward purity, is exposed by Christ in terrible words of invective, sanctified by a vivid prophecy of Isaiah, which they had conveniently forgotten:

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias (Isaiah) prophecy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:7-9).

The Lord goes on to declare that the hypocritical nation must be uprooted (as uprooted it was in A. D. 70). They are plants which the Father never planted (Matthew 15:13). They are blind leaders of the blind, and both must fall into the ditch (Matthew 15:44).

He departs from thence and goes to the gentiles in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon as a symbol of the gospel kingdom passing from Israel to the gentile world (Matthew 15:21). A woman of Canaan cries unto Him for mercy, naming Him "Thou son of David." "How hast thou broken forth before the time?" asks Samuel Rutherford in his series of sermons on this marvelous passage. The woman's faith triumphs over all the barriers of dispensational time raised against her faith, and presses through to the Kingdom of Heaven in advance of the times of the gentiles. Israel rejects the true Son of David. The gentile world acclaims Him and seeks His mercy--"Thou son of David." The Lord is showing that the time was at hand when the Word of God would depart from the earthly Israel and be sent into all the world, that the ensigns of Emmanuel's reign might be planted in the uttermost parts of Satan's empire.

The woman's daughter is healed. The devil by which she was grievously vexed is cast out. The daughter's state typifies the devil-oppressed tribes of Japheth, whose day of mercy was at last about to dawn. And

Shem's tents--the privileges and promises made to Abraham the Shemite--would be taken from his natural descendants, Israel, and given to the gentiles, (Genesis 9:27). The devils in the gentile nations would be cast out, even as figured by the downfall of Satan in Revelation 20: "cast into the bottomless pit that he might deceive the nations no more." Satan bound, Satan unbound--these are figures of God's providential dealings with the world.

Christ's ability to satisfy the heart and to restore human nature is shown in the ensuing part of the chapter as He returns to Galilee, not to the crowded Jewish cities but to a desert place where He again ascends the mountain, typical of His ascent to His kingly throne after His death. The needy bring their sick and afflicted and He heals them all, for this is His kingdom--not earthly glory, but the healing of the soul's diseases and the restoring of fallen humanity to life and godliness.

The feeding of the four thousand follows, ensuing upon three days during which the multitude, having consumed what food they may have brought with them, languished. He will not send them away empty. By this act, He shows that the miracle of supplying the bread of life to a hungry and needy world must follow those three days during which His Body lay in the tomb.

ISRAEL DEAF AND SPEECHLESS

Mark's account records that after His return from Tyre and Sidon He healed a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment. The miracle was extraordinary for the introduction of a new element. The Lord puts His fingers into the man's ears, spits and touches his tongue, then looking up to heaven, HE SIGHS AND SAYS "EPHPHATHA"--BE OPENED.

We should expect, and we do in fact find, a reason for this remarkable action and the careful preservation by Mark of the actual word used by the Lord--"Ephphatha." The account fits perfectly into the picture being built up of Israel's failure and soon-coming rejection by God. The deafness is the token of that obduracy by which Israel resisted the word of Christ. The sigh was prophetic of the coming judgment upon the wicked nation for their obduracy. The action is deliberately taken from Ezekiel 21:6-7.

SIGH, THEREFORE, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes. And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings; because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water: behold, it cometh, and shall be brought to pass, saith the Lord God.

There is scarce room for any comment here, so plain is it that the Lord is designedly by His action of sighing drawing attention to the prophecy of Ezekiel. This is reinforced by a similar action in the next chapter of Mark, where the unbelief of the Pharisees causes Him to, "sigh deeply in His spirit" (Mark 8:12).

The speech impediment referred to illustrates, the inability of the Jewish people any more to articulate the Word of God. The charge to those round about that they should tell no one of the miracles was a sign that henceforth Christ would be withdrawn from them as a nation; they would not know Him, but the elect, illustrated by the man who was healed, would know Him and speak His praises.

Mark also records in Chapter 8, verses 22-26, the remarkable case of the blind man upon whom the Lord laid His hands. At first, he "sees men as trees walking." The Lord lays His hands upon the man's eyes the second time, and this time he sees clearly.

Some who today are concerned to re-introduce charismata to the Christian Church are at pains to excuse their many failures by reference to this case of so-called "partial healing." If these friends act by the Spirit of God (which we gravely doubt), they certainly do not speak by the Spirit of discernment, which is a remarkable thing, considering it is more important to have light than to practice miracles. Had they been under the power of the Spirit of Knowledge as much as they imagine themselves to be under the power of the Spirit of Charisma, they would be better instructed and would have discerned that the dual action of the Savior denoted not a near failure of His healing power (How COULD these friends, be guilty of so grievous a blasphemy?); but would have seen a display of the Two Covenants--the Old and the New. The man is Israel. The divine power gives in the old Law only a foreshadowing of the New Covenant. Hence its worshippers could not see clearly the restoration of man

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