

## The Quiet Hour.

### Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand.

S. S. LESSON—Matt. 14: 13-23. March 20, 1984.

GOLDEN TEXT—Jesus saith unto them, I am the bread of life.—John 6: 35.

BY REV. C. MACKINNON, B.D., SYDNEY, N.S.W.

He departed . . . into a desert place apart, v. 13. Rest was imperative, that His great heart might ease its burdens and prepare for new tasks. Here lies a needed lesson for our hurried age. When perturbed by anxious fears, rather than act hastily, come apart for a season with the Lord. When the press of business becomes so great that we feel we have no time for rest, then we need it most. "I have so much to do," said Luther, "that I cannot get on without three hours a day praying." Sir Matthew Hale declared, "If I omit praying and reading God's word in the morning, nothing goes well all day."

Jesus . . . was moved with compassion, v. 14. Although our Saviour's immediate purpose was a little much-needed rest for Himself and His disciples, yet, when from the mountain side He saw a great stream of people searching for Him, some on crutches, some with timid step of the blind, some carried on litters by affectionate friends, a deep compassion filled His heart. Even solitary communion with God seemed a selfish act of piety. So He abandoned His purpose, and descended among the multitude and healed their sick. A great compassion is the first requisite for persistent Christian work. Indeed no other cause is necessary. If once we really saw the need of the world, and knew the power of the Saviour, we could not remain satisfied until we had brought some thirsty soul to the streams of living water. Without being a physician, a man may be a great healer.

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased, Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow?"

Send the multitude away, v. 15. We must not act the part of the disciples, who tried to shrink their responsibility. We must not say, "Our congregation is small, we have little wealth. Send the poor away. We are sorry, but we can do nothing for them." Nor, more selfishly still, ought we to say to the managers, "Keep the few remaining pews in our church for good families. Send the multitudes away to down-town churches and mission halls." "That door," said a courageous minister to his people, "shall fly open as quickly at the touch of a poor man's hand, as at that of the rich." But, shame to tell, the minister had to leave. That happened on this continent.

Give ye them to eat, v. 16. A beautiful story is told of King Alfred, in the days when he was hard pressed by the Danes. The royal provision was reduced to one loaf. A beggar knocked at the castle for food. The Queen was sending him away, when Alfred ordered, "Give him half. He that could feed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, will make the other half suffice for more than our necessity." There is a giving that multiplies our resources, and a withholding that lessens them. Ministering of our means to the poor is sowing the seed that returns a plentiful harvest.

The five loaves, and the two fishes, v. 19. It matters not how small our gifts or how meagre our talents, if they are cheerfully given to Christ, he can multiply their power. On the island of Skye in 1812, religion was

well nigh dead. Only five or six New Testaments were to be found among several thousands of people. An itinerant preacher attracted large audiences, but apparently without results, until a blind fiddler was converted. The labors of this man brought about a mighty revival.

The fragments, v. 20. A carpet in the San Francisco mint was once burnt, and yielded \$2,500.00 of gold. This had lain there in dust so fine as to be altogether unsuspected. What waste material is there not in every church? Let us practise a sanctified economy, not only of material blessings, but of spiritual gifts as well, that nothing may be lost in the Master's service.

He went up into a mountain apart to pray, v. 23. Where a man prays the most fervently, may be a test of his real character. Where is it that we offer our most fervid supplications? Is it in the hearing of large audiences, as the Pharisees loved to pray, or is it in the secrecy of the closet, that our Father who seeth in secret may reward us openly? It was God alone who heard Him, when

"Cold mountains and the midnight air Witnessed the fervor of His prayer."

### Plain Talk About Bible Study.

BY REV. JAMES STALKER, D.D.

The division of the Bible into chapters and verses is a modern device, reaching back only a few centuries. At the present day it is frequently spoken of with disapproval, but I fancy it serves several good purposes, though it is certainly a pity that the divisions have not been made with greater skill.

One use of the chapters is to indicate portions fairly suitable for daily reading, and the chief use of the verses is, that a golden saying, when thus detached from the surrounding matter and rounded into a compact form, attracts the attention more powerfully and sticks more easily in the memory.

Most readers, I presume, read from chapter to chapter day by day, till they have finished a book; and this is distinctly advisable, although an experienced reader will have certain books and certain parts of books which he reads oftener than the rest.

For many years I have distributed to my congregation at the New Year little lectionaries, in which a portion is indicated for every day, the entire Bible being covered in a few years.

The danger of this mode of reading the Bible is that the exercise may become mechanical and be regarded merely as a duty. There are those who would feel uneasy if their daily portion were omitted, who, nevertheless, could hardly tell, when the book is closed, what they have been reading about.

But there is a way of circumventing this tendency, which I would strongly recommend. This is, to pick out a single verse every time from the chapter read, giving it the name, if you choose, of the Golden Text, because it seems to be the choicest in expression, or the profoundest in thought, or the one best suited for present need. The search for it will keep attention on the strain from the beginning to the end of the chapter.

Having chosen it, either underline it, doing this, not with a pencil, but with a pen,

so that the mark may be tidy, or write it out in a notebook kept for the purpose. A any rate, commit it to memory, and let your mind revert to it at intervals in the course of the day. Thus you will suck out its sweetness, and its fragrance will perfume the breath of your life.

By this simple means you will gradually accumulate spiritual wealth, as the miner swells his pile by adding grain to grain of gold, and before long the Word of Christ will dwell in you richly. A single verse thus annexed every day would mean three hundred and sixty-five verses in a year; and what a treasure of wit and wisdom, of profound and tender truth, would thus in course of time be laid up in the mind!

We learn from the example of Jesus Himself the priceless value of texts thus committed to memory. When He was tempted in the wilderness for forty days, He met every one of the attacks of Satan with a text exactly suited to the occasion.

But where and how did He get these arrows with which to pierce the tempter? He found them in the same way as we may fill our quiver for similar conflicts. If, as a boy, Jesus had not filled His mind with the words of the Old Testament, He would not have had the weapons wherewith to fight the battles of the Lord when the necessity arose. But, His memory being stored with multitudes of texts taught Him by His mother, or heard in the synagogue, or read by Himself in the sacred rolls, He was able, when the trial came, to select from this resource exactly that which the occasion required.

Alas, for the soul surprised in the Wilderness of temptation with no such equipment! The tempter will riddle such a one through and through.

There are many diligent and successful students of Scripture who never read the Bible otherwise than in the way described; but for many years I have been in the habit of recommending, besides, another method of study, which may be called book by book; and I do so because I have experienced the benefit of it myself.

I well remember the first time in my life I ever read a whole book of the Bible through at a stretch.

It was in France. I was in a town where there was no Protestant service. In the early morning I attended the Roman Catholic church; but, the worship being over about breakfast time, I had the rest of the day on my hands.

Having sauntered out of the town and cast myself down on a green knoll, I began by mere chance, to read the Epistle to the Romans. I read one chapter; but instead of stopping there, as I had been accustomed to do, I read a second, and then a third. By degrees I was caught in the current of the great argument, which swept me irresistibly along.

Then I forgot everything except the delicious impact of the crowding thoughts and the kaleidoscopic vistas opening out on every hand, till at last I came out, excited and overwrought, at the close of the last chapter.

That experience was a revelation to me of a new way of finding interest in the Bible. I saw that a book of the Bible is a unity—the discussion of a single great theme. In the light of this whole, all the parts become luminous, the meaning of every verse being manifest when it is seen in its place as the bridge from what goes before to what comes after.

Ever since that day I have cultivated this method of reading the books of the Bible, and it has brought me untold profit and satisfaction.