

titude is sometimes deceived in this matter, as when, for instance, crowds followed Peter the Hermit or Walter the Penitent, imagining that these men would lead them to glorious victory.

For the first time in John's gospel we read today of a multitude following the Lord Jesus. We have seen him up till now sought by a few, visited by night, welcomed in a Samaritan city, but rejected by the rulers and the people of Jerusalem generally. To-day, however, we see a great multitude following him. Yet us look carefully at this grand sight. It was not actually for the first time that this happened, for when, being rejected at Jerusalem, he went about Galilee "preaching the glad tidings of the kingdom of God," crowds were continually gathering around him. The enthusiasm, however, of the people who saw his mighty works culminated on this occasion, which, as the great crisis in his earthly history, is recorded by all the evangelists, but most fully, in all its bearings and results, by John.

The question arises first: Why did the multitude thus follow him? They were attracted

Partly by what he was. At an early period his teaching had struck them because he taught "as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Matt. 7. 29. And crowds from a distance, "when they heard what great things he did, came unto him." Mark 3. 8. Both his words and works told of love and mercy and forgiveness and succor for sinful men, and met the need of the weary and heavily laden. Yet few really looked beyond the earthly benefits he conferred; and they were attracted

Partly by what they imagined him to be. They had been looking for Messiah, "the anointed One to come." When John the Baptist's preaching drew crowds from all parts to the Jordan valley, we are told that "the people were in expectation, whether he were the Christ or not." Luke 3. 15. But it was an earthly leader they looked for, one who would help them to throw off the Roman yoke and restore the ancient glory and prosperity of their nation. They hoped the wonder-working Prophet of Nazareth would turn out to be such a leader, and in this hope they followed him.

The question comes next: Were they disappointed? Look at the wonderful story given us in vers. 5-13. Our Lord, who had gone over to the other side of the lake for rest, as the other evangelists tell us, sees this great company coming after him. He is ready to give up his seclusion to meet them. And, more than that, he at once in his own mind provides for the bodily need which he knows will be felt by them before the close of the day. Vers. 5, 6. When the time of need is actually arrived the disciples take note of it, as we are told in the other gospels. But the Lord Jesus is ready, and the command is given: "Make the men sit down." And then, with the five loaves and two fishes actually at hand, the need of over five thousand persons is fully and abundantly met; met, too, so that a large surplus remains over. Such a miracle encouraged

the multitude in their highest hopes. "This is of a truth," they said, "that Prophet that should come into the world." They were in no wise disappointed.

But what follows? They determine to come and "take him by force to make him a king." But he is gone. He has withdrawn himself. And later on in this chapter we find that when they "took shipping" and followed him back to the western shore of the lake, his reception of them and his solemn declaration showed that their hopes were utterly futile, that he was not such a Leader as they thought, and so the story ends with their entire rejection of him.

Is Jesus, then, one who in the end disappoints those who follow him? This is our next question. Look at the next incident related in this chapter. His disciples, who, little as they yet understand his mission, have believed in and accepted him, go down to the shore alone—unwillingly, as we gather from the expression used by Matthew and Mark, that he "constrained them." They would not, if they could, be absent from him an hour! But they did not expect to be parted long from him. They had been told to go before him into Bethsaida, and they evidently supposed he would follow them, perhaps in a smaller or swifter vessel. For we read that the time passed on, "and it was now dark and Jesus had not come to them? Were they to be disappointed? The wind, too, became threatening, the sea ran high, and with all their toil they could make little progress. Then he came, not as they expected, but walking on the sea—calmly treading the stormy waves, which made a grand and glorious pathway for their Creator and their Lord. How quickly was their alarm over, how quickly was their toil over, how quickly was their disappointment changed to wondering gladness! Christ never disappoints. He has provided for all need; he is always ready to succor; he is an almighty Saviour and an unfulfilling Friend.

Then why were the multitude disappointed?

We might guess the answer from the narrative we have just considered. But the Golden Text supplies it fully. "I am the Bread of Life." The multitude looked for earthly gifts, and earthly advantages from him. He had something infinitely higher and better to bestow—himself, as the supply of all need: first of all, of spiritual need, and then, in natural sequence, of temporal, "all things," being "with him" freely given. Rom. 8. 32. The multitude had set their expectation too low.

And this is why we sometimes meet with people with, as has been said, "just enough religion to make them miserable." They have never looked high enough. They have, in a certain sense, followed the Lord Jesus, but never understood what he has to give.

Let the class ask themselves these questions:

Have I ever followed the Lord Jesus?

Have I been disappointed?

Am I ready to receive his great gift, himself, as the Bread of Life, the satisfaction of the soul?

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