

Fragment of Letter

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. . . . I was struck a few days since by a sight of the disciples and their Lord in the matter of feeding the multitude. It gave me to see the two great objects in close and full contrast — man and God, the heart that we carry, and the heart of Jesus.

In Matthew 14 the motion begins with the disciples, but it is to dismiss the multitude rather than to feed them. 'Send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.' This was a wretched motion of their heart. It was, as we say, one word for the multitude and two for themselves; for they wanted to be left alone, and felt the intrusion of the people. (See Mark 6.) There was something both of hypocrisy and coldheartedness in this motion. It was a wretched sample of the common selfishness.

The Lord's heart was different. He at once speaks of feeding them on the spot, and not of sending them away. And how blessed when our hearts are rebuked by His, beloved, when the dark ground of our selfishness only after this manner sets off the brightness of His grace and love. We ought to delight in that light which, while it rebukes us, brings Him in, and leaves His reflection with us.

But the disciples are angry. They have but a few loaves and fishes. How could they spread a table for such a multitude? Here was a further disclosure of their naughty hearts. There was no *faith* there, as there was no *love* there. They knew of nothing but the palpable provision of their basket — loaves and fishes. They did not calculate on having Christ Himself in the midst of them. And this Jesus silently rebukes. 'Bring them hither to Me'; as if to intimate, You have more in your company than loaves and fishes; you have the God of the desert, who once fed your fathers there forty years. And He then proved that His arm was not shortened that it could not save, but spread a table in the wilderness again. Here was man and God. Here was the heart we carry and the heart of Jesus. But Jesus does not upbraid them. He lets their own reins chasten them, giving them another witness of Himself in treading the waves as He had fed the people.

In the next chapter, Matthew 15, on the like occasion, the motion begins with Him, and not with them, as before. But, oh, how different! How differently does the heart of Christ enter the scene of human need from what their heart had entered it. 'I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat. If I shall send them away they will faint by the way, for divers of them come from far.' It is not with Him as with them, 'Send the multitude away'; but, 'I have compassion on the multitude: He shows how *minutely* He had acquainted Himself with their sorrow, taking notice of the time they had been with Him, of the journey they had to take, and of the distance they had come. (See Mark 7: 2, 3.)

There is something *perfect* in all this minuteness. But there is nothing to correspond with it in the hearts of the disciples. They are wanting towards their fellows and towards their Lord. They have no answer for this motion on the part of their Master but that which sadly betrayed their heart in contrast with His. The recollection of the late feeding of the multitude seems to have entirely departed. They are only again full of the impossibility of feeding so *many* with so slender a provision as they had. Would we have believed it, dear brother, that they could so soon have forgotten the lesson of the previous chapter, and that too under the very same circumstances? We might say they could not have forgotten it. But it appears to have left them altogether, so indifferent is the heart of man to the display of the

glory of God, and so careless to the cry and need of the sorrow around.

We look at the two objects — man and God, the heart we carry and the heart of Jesus. We are to be humbled by the one and comforted by the other. The contrast is perfect, as these occasions of feeding the multitude show us. But it is happy to see that the heart of Christ is not wearied out by what it again and again got from man and in man. He did not give up His disciples after such discoveries as these; but on He went with them in patient love even to the end, though such occasions may let us see what a coarse and opposing material He had to do with.

Be sure, beloved, you do not know *one* of these lessons without the *other*. Learn what man is, that you may be humbled; learn what God is, that you may be comforted. But I only speak by way of common edification and communion with you; for it is easier to *teach* the lessons of God than to *learn* them, as I know. J. G. B."