

# THE SAVIOUR'S LESSON TO THE WORKING CLASSES OF GALILEE<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon preached by the Rev. John Foreman, on Lords Day Morning,  
March 28th, 1858

“When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" John  
6:5

Jesus has not less favor toward his poor family than he used to have. He takes up no new condition, but turns all things to a use for the benefit of his poor implicit children.

A great multitude followed him; for what? Because they saw his miracles. He saw them, that they were poor and in need of food. ‘Where’ said he to Philip, ‘shall we buy bread, that these poor people may eat?’ This he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he should do. Philip answers, ‘Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take even a little.’ (Two hundred pence was a proverbial expression among the Jews for anything out of the way.) Two hundred pence would in those days amount to six pounds five shillings, and perhaps this sum was all they had when put together, a deal of money in those days; reckoning by flesh and blood they were set fast. Men cannot take up God’s covers and see what is under them. There lies a hidden secrecy, that that looks most barren to the eye of man has often proved most fertile in the hands of God. Look at the bee extracting honey from a poisonous flower, water made fresh and good, filtered and refined, in the pure form of rain, by the favor of God’s hand.

But the loaves that are to feed this multitude, where are they to come from? ‘If we’, says Philip, ‘lay out six pounds five shillings, we shall be ruined; and yet what are we do?’ Our Lord knew that Philip could not buy the bread. He took the loaves, it looked a poor little concern, as well off without as with them. After they had sat down on the ground, ‘Give me those little loaves and fishes.’ Philip and the rest of the disciples go in order. no hurry or confusion, and distribute the food, each looking at the other in astonishment. Five thousand men were fed. on the best bread they ever ate made by the Bread-maker, and then says the Savior, ‘Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost.’ (If you have enough for two days, do not spend it in one.) They gathered and filled twelve baskets. Look at the prudence of the Savior. Do not waste because there is plenty; you will want food tomorrow. But could he not give them as much as they wanted? Yes; but by this he was pleased to illustrate his power and our weakness, and discourage waste and extravagance.

Let us look at the doctrinal points. The proposition made Philip come to a standstill; but our Lord knew himself what he would do, he was at no loss, and need not ask advice of men or angels. He who can search the human heart, can search all nature. We know nothing as the Lord does, he sees. The severest winter precedes the most fertile summer. Our Lord has no new provision to make.

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<sup>1</sup> From the Gospel Herald: or Poor Christians Magazine, Volume 26, February 1858 Page 111ff

Here was his purpose already decided. He put Philip to the test, but he himself knew what he would do, He stood serene with the elements in his hand. There was but little to begin with; he chose to speak one thing to Philip and know another in his mind, yet there was no contradiction in our Lord; he does what he will do, worthy of himself, and to the admiration of those who look on. Cardinals and priests may tell wonderful histories of their saints and marvels, but they have nothing like that. The lying mimicries of Popery will be stopped by and by; them and their fooleries will be scattered to the four winds.

This miracle calls for great consideration. If they had not got any food, they need not want any, he could feed them as easily as if he had a granary full of corn. Our Redeemer comprehended all the aspects of this affair before he began, but he did not tell Philip his meaning. Our minds soon draw to a conclusion, and we make a muddle of it. We soon say what we think, while he displays a power that knows no limit, and brings all the materials of his foreknowledge to carry out his designs. He meant to feed them, and feed them as no one else could feed them. Can we contemplate too much his knowledge, and his wisdom, as exhibited in this miracle? A sermon has been sent me preached for the sake of the working classes, at Westminster Abbey, by the Bishop of Lincoln. The title of the sermon is, 'The Savior's power limited by man's un-belief.' The stuff and nonsense of the bishop, on this subject, will not do for me. If he cannot give better instruction to the working classes, he had better leave it alone. Words mean one thing in the pulpit, and another out of it; and literary men who know their sense, can give learned disquisitions, and explanatory interpretations, but when they get there, they make a fool of words. Redemption means 'No' when in the pulpit, and 'Yes' when out of it. People won't believe. Jesus warns, invites, and entreats men to be saved. Stuff and non-sense. We may all be saved if we will. What! a redemption larger than salvation? What haphazard; hit or miss. An awkward thing that unbelief should, prevent salvation. Will a soul be lost for whom Christ died? If a bishop swears to it, I will not believe it. You might as well believe that there is no God as believe that Christ can die for one lost. He himself knew what he would do. Men must snatch the sun out of the heavens before they snatch a soul out of the hands of Christ.

If the Lord waited until we had faith there would not be a man of Adam's race saved at all. God knows what he will do. Men attribute salvation to human causes. There has always been some saved. Why some? why not all? Why any? it may be asked. Faith is the gift of God; many can talk about it; but look for the work of the Spirit, it seems as if that was intentionally concealed.

Independency, what more fully declares Christ to be God? Who but he knew what he would do? Many know what they intend to do, but have to wait to see what they can do. 'I'll go here, go there' yes, if God will. When man speaks of his own intentions, he should always put in an 'if.' But here, in this miracle, is knowledge at will's command. He knew, and the thing was done as he willed it, after the counsel of his will. He knew no one could prevent him. Surely the reins of government must be in his hands.

Next, we see an expression of the goodness of God. What had they done for him that he should feed them? What poor soul but can say that small beginnings, that barley cakes, have been turned into the greatest advantage for their encouragement and comfort? There was not the smallest thing in these people of meritorious value so that he should put my name on the great roll of eternal life.

They did nothing before, nor paid anything after the dinner was over. Goodness, free goodness, gave them more than they could eat.

Look at the uniformity of the Lamb's conduct. Is this the only time that he proves his Philips? Many times, things have caused them to be fearful. Man has been brought to a standstill, his hands tied, and none but God knows what to do. Gods sovereignty and man's dependence can be seen in all his dealing with us. Look at Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jakob; the latter on his dying bed refers to Luz. He picked up there a basket of fragments to last all his life through, 'I am with thee; I am Almighty.' dependence on God, support in danger, safety all through. Look at Joseph; they hated his dreams and him. God could have prevented it. He is accused, he goes to prison, and why? That the faithfulness, goodness, and power of God may come out with more admirable proof. Pharaoh dreams; now the mystery is explained; Joseph must come out of prison; Jacob must say he is yet alive; and God knew what he would do.

Look at Israel at the Red Sea; the Lord knew what he would do there; 'Here,' said they, 'we shall die and be buried in disgrace.' They are helpless, them can only stand still; the sea divides. The Lord kept his word, he did not tell them until they came to the place, and then he worked one of the most glorious deliverances that a people ever did witness. He did not want Moses and the counsels of the congregation, no, he knew himself what he would do.

Our time is expired, or I might go on through the life of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, David, Solomon, proving that he has done all things well, and done nothing in vain; that all man's changes, contrivances, and plans, never altered his fixed purposes. His will was always performed in purpose for the benefit of his people. He only knows what he will do. Amen.