

Matthew 15 Commentary-C H Spurgeon

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MATTHEW 15:1-20 OUR KING COMBATING FORMALISTS

Matthew 15:1,2. THEN came to, Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hand, when they eat bread.

When our Lord was busiest his enemies assailed him. These ecclesiastics “of Jerusalem ” were probably the cream of the set, and from their great reputation they reckoned upon an easy victory over the rustic preacher.

Perhaps they were a deputation from headquarters, sent to confound the new Teacher. They had a question to raise, which to them may have seemed important; or possibly they pretended to think it so to answer their own purposes. Traditions of the elders were great things with them: to transgress these must be a crime indeed. Washing of the hands is a thing proper enough; one could wish it were oftener practiced; but to exalt it into a religious rite is a folly and a sin. These “scribes and Pharisee ” washed their hands, whether they needed washing or not, out of a supposed zeal to be rid of any particle that might render them ceremonially unclean. Our Lord’s disciples had so far entered into Christian liberty that they did not observe the rabbinical tradition: “they wash not their hands when they eat bread. ” Why should they wash if their hands were clean? Tradition had no power over their consciences. No man has any more right to institute a new duty than to neglect an old one. The issuing of commands is for the King alone. Yet these religionists inquire why the Lord’s disciples break a law which was no law. It will be well if our opponents are unable to bring against us any worse charge than this

Matthew 15:3. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

“He answered ” their question by asking them another. This was a very usual way with our Lord, and we may often imitate him in discussions with captious persons. Our Lord turns a blaze of light upon them by the question — Why do ye transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? What is a “tradition ” when compared with a “commandment ”?

What is a tradition when it is in conflict with a commandment? What are elders in comparison with GOD? Our Lord knew best how to handle these messengers of the evil powers. His question carried the war into their own territory, and turned their boastful assault into utter rout.

Matthew 15:4-6. For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by tradition.

Our Lord explains his question, and lays home his accusation. God had bound the son and daughter to honor the parent; and this unquestionably included rendering to father and mother such help as they might need.

From this duty there could be no escape without breaking the plain command of God. It was always right, by the law of nature, to be grateful to parents; and by the law of Moses it was always a deadly sin to revile them. In Exodus 21:17 we read: “He that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.” Father and mother are to be had in reverence, and cherished with love; and the precept which ordains this, is called “the first commandment with promise.” There could be no mistake as to the meaning of the divine law, yet the base teachers of the period had invented a method of excusing men from the performance of so obvious a duty.

These wretched tradition - lovers taught that if a man cried, “Corban! A gift ”; and thus nominally set apart for God what his parents sought of him, he must not afterwards give it to them. If in anger, or even in pretense, he placed what was requested by father or mother under a ban he became free from the obligation to aid his parents. It is true he was not required by the Rabbis to

carry out his vow, and actually give the money or the goods to God; but as he had compromised the sacred name, he must on no account hand over the gift to his parents. So that a hasty word would loose any child from his duty to aid his father or his mother; and then he might pretend that he was very sorry for having said it, but that his conscience would not permit him to break the ban. Vile hypocrites! Advocates of the devil! Was ever device more shallow? Yet thus they “made the commandment of God of one effort.”

Matthew 15:7, 8. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

Right well did they deserve the name which the indignant Savior fixed upon them: “Ye hypocrites. ” They were agitated about hands unwashed, and yet laid their foul hands upon God’s most holy law. The prophetic words of Isaiah were indeed descriptive of them: he had pictured them to the life. Theirs was mouth-religion, lip-homage, and that only. Their heart never approached the Lord at all.

Thus, our Lord gave his opponents Scripture instead of tradition: he broke their wooden weapons with the sword of the Spirit. Holy Scripture must be our weapon against the Church of traditions: nothing will overthrow Rome but the Word of the Lord.

When quoting from the prophecy of Isaiah, our blessed Lord not only used a translation, but he gave the sense freely; thus rebuking the mere word-chopping of the Rabbis. They could count the letters of a sacred book, and yet utterly miss its meaning: he gave the soul and spirit of the inspired utterance. Jesus insisted upon heart-worship, and said nothing as to the matter of washing or not washing the hands before eating bread.

That was too paltry a point for him to dwell upon.

Matthew 15:9. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Religion based on human authority is worthless; we must worship the true God in the way of his own appointing, or we do not worship him at all.

Doctrines and ordinances are only to be accepted when the divine Word supports them, and they are to be accepted for that reason only. The most punctilious form of devotion is vain worship, if it is regulated by man’s ordinance apart from the Lord’s own command.

Matthew 15:10. And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand.

He turns to the common throng, among whom he had wrought his miracles of love. He called the multitude and bade them “hear, and understand. ” It looks as if he would say by his actions that he would rather teach the ignorant peasants than those false-hearted scribes and Pharisees. He had more hope of being understood by the ignorant multitude than by educated men who had so wretchedly enslaved their judgments by following worthless traditions. The appeal of the gospel is from the doctors to the people. These last have more common sense and honesty than the former; yet even these need the exhortation, “Hear, and understand. ”

Matthew 15:11. Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

Here is something for the crowd to think over, and for the Pharisees to chew upon. It would be a riddle to many, and a surprise to all.

Preeminently it would be a staggering statement for formalists. Religionists of the day placed the chief point of morals in meats and drinks, but the Lord Jesus declared that it lay in thoughts and acts. The Pharisees had now a string to harp upon, since harp they would: this saying would afford a text for malicious comment for many a day. They had sought to lay hold upon a sentence which they could use as an accusation, and in this case he gave them one which they might quote with that design if they dared to do so. It was diametrically opposed to their teaching, and yet it was not easy to meet its keen edge, or withstand its singular force.

Matthew 15:12. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying

The disciples evidently thought more of offending the Pharisees than their Master did. He knew that they would be offended, and thought it no calamity that they should be. He placed his remarkable aphorism in their way, that they might find themselves balked and graveled by it. They had come to him in a fawning manner, desiring to catch him in his speech: he was disgusted with their hypocrisy, and by this staggering statement he unmasked them, and they came out in their true colors. They could not further conceal their hate: henceforth they could not entrap the disciples by their professions of friendliness.

Matthew 15:13. But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

If men are themselves an offense, they deserve to be offended. If these professed teachers of God's mind cavil at God's Son, they deserve no quarter; but it is right and wise to treat them to truth which shall annoy them. A good gardener is careful to uproot weeds as well as to water plants. Our Lord's sententious utterance operated like a hoe to uproot these men from their religious profession; and he meant that it should do so. But what a solemn word is this! If our religion is not wholly of God it will come to an end, and that end will be destruction. No matter how fair the flower, if the Father hath not planted it, its doom is sealed: it shall not be pruned, but "rooted up." Those whom the truth uproots are uprooted indeed.

Matthew 15:14. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

He turned from them as unworthy of further notice, saying, "Let them alone." There was no need for the disciples to combat the Pharisees, they would be uprooted in the natural order of things by the inevitable consequences of their own course. Both themselves and their dupes would "fall into the ditch" of error and absurdity; and ultimately come to utter destruction. In every case it is so: when the bigoted teacher leads the ignorant disciple, they must both go wrong. The same is the case with every form of spiritual blindness in those who lead the thought of a period, and in those who follow their erroneous guidance. The philosophic unbelief of this age is blind with self-conceit, and fearful is the ditch towards which it is hastening. Alas! its teachers are carrying precious souls with them into the ditch of Atheism and anarchy.

O Lord, suffer us not to be despairing as to the present ascendancy of false doctrine. In patience may we possess our souls! We cannot make either the blind leaders or their blind followers see the ditch before them; but it is there all the same, and their fall is certain. Thou alone canst open the eyes of the blind, and we trust that this miracle of grace will be wrought by thee.

Matthew 15:15. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.

The saying, which Peter calls a parable, was spoken to the multitude, and then were bidden to understand it; but assuredly they did not comprehend it, for even the College of Apostles failed to grapple with it. Peter, as spokesman, did well to go at once to the fountain-head and humbly say, "Declare unto us this parable." He that uttered the dark saying could best interpret it.

Matthew 15:16. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

Of course the Pharisees would hate the light, and so refuse to see the spiritual truth which our Lord had set before them in so forcible a fashion.

Nor was it wonderful that the crowd should be too ignorant to see the divine meaning of the compact sentence. But should not the chosen twelve have had clearer insight? After all their Lord's teaching, were they "yet without understanding?" Should they not have reached the inner sense of their Lord's utterance? Alas, how often have we been in a like state! How pertinently might the question be put to us, "Are ye also yet without understanding?"

Matthew 15:17. Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

After years of the Master's teaching, are we still unable to grasp an elementary truth? Can we not discern between physical and spiritual defilement? Food does not touch the soul: it passes through the body, but it does not enter the affections, or the understanding, And therefore does not defile a man. That which is eaten is material substance, and does not come into contact with the moral sense. This is clear enough to any unprejudiced mind. Meat passes through every passage of the bodily frame, from its entrance at the mouth, its passage through the bowels, to its ultimate expulsion; but it bears no relation to the mental and spiritual part of our being; and it is there only that real defilement can be caused.

Matthew 15:18. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man.

The outcomings of the mind have sprung from the soul of the man, and have a moral character about them: "things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart. " Words, and the thoughts which wear words as their garments, and the acts which are the embodiment of words; these are of the man himself, and these defile him. If the mind or heart had nothing to do with an act, it would no more pollute a man than the food which he swallows and ejects. Because acts and words come not from the mouth only, but from the soul, they are of far more importance than meats and drinks. Of course, defilement comes to a man when he is guilty of gluttony and drunkenness; yet this is not because of the mere meat or drink, but because the taking of them to excess is the exercise of unbridled appetite, and this also grows by that which gratifies it.

Matthew 15:19. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

What a list! What must that heart be out of which so many evils pour forth!

These are the bees: what must the hive be! "Evil thoughts ", or reasonings, such as these Pharisees had been guilty of. "Modern thought" is a specimen of these evils; it comes from the heart rather than from the head. "Murders " begin not with the dagger, but with the malice of the soul. "Adulteries and fornications " are first gloated over in the heart before they are enacted by the body. The heart is the cage from whence these unclean birds fly forth. "Thefts " also are born in the heart: a man would not wrongfully take with the hand if he had not wrongfully desired with the heart. "false witness ", or lying and slander: this, too, first ferments in the heart, and then its venom is spit out in the conversation. He that utters "blasphemies " against his Maker shows a very black heart: how could he fall into such a needless, useless vice, unless his inmost soul had been steeped in rebellion against the Lord? These dreadful evils all flow from one fountain, from the very nature and life of fallen man.

Matthew 15:20. These are the thing. which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

They not only come from a defiled nature, but they still further defile the man . Thus had the Savior proved his aphorism. The things from within evidently, are of a most defiling character, and make a man unfit for communion with God, and for the performance of holy duties; but the neglect of having water poured on the hands cannot be in the least comparable thereto. Yet those who had no repentance of polluting sins were struck with horror at a man's eating a piece of bread with unwashen hands Blessed Master, wash me within, and save me from the defilements of corrupt nature! Suffer me not to make outward forms my trust, but in the hidden parts purify thou me!

MATTHEW 15:21-28 OUR KING AND THE WOMAN OF CANAAN

Matthew 15:21. Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

He left the loathsome company of the Pharisees, and went thence, going as far away as he could without quitting his own country. The great Bishop went to the very borders of his diocese. An inward attraction drew him where he knew that a believing heart was yearning for him. He was sent to the house of Israel as a preacher; but he interpreted his commission in its largest sense, and went "into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon." When those at the center prove incorrigible, the Lord goes to those who can be only reached from the circumference. Let us always plough to the very end of the field, and serve our day and generation to the extreme limits of our sphere.

Matthew 15:22. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

"Behold": here is something worth beholding; good for eyes and hearts.

Just as Jesus went to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, a woman came out of the same coasts to meet him. Sooner or later, a meeting will come about between Christ and seeking souls. This "woman of Canaan" had no claim on account of her nationality: she was a Gentile of the worst sort, of a race long before condemned to die. She came from the narrow strip of land whereon the Tyrians dwelt; and like Hiram, of Tyre, she knew the name of David; but she went further, for she had faith in David's Son. Love to her daughter led her to travel, to cry, to beseech, to implore mercy. What will not a mother's love achieve? Her need had abolished the barrier between Gentile and Jew; she appealed to Jesus as though she were of the same country as his disciples. She asked the healing of her child as a mercy to herself: "Have mercy on me." She asked it of Jesus as Lord. She asked it of One greater than Solomon, the son of David, the wisest and most potent of wonderworkers. She put the case briefly and pathetically, and pleaded for her daughter with all a mother's loving anxiety.

Her need taught her how to pray. Until we, also, know what we require, and are full of hopeful longings, we shall never plead prevailingly. Do we pray for our children as this woman pleaded for her daughter? Have we not good reason to take her for our example?

Matthew 15:23. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

Silence was a hard answer; for it is translatable by fear into something worse than the harshest speech. "Not a word", not a word from him whose every word is power! This was a heavy discouragement. Yet she was not silenced by the Lord's silence. She increased her entreaties. The disciples were mistaken when they said, "She crieth after us." No, no, she cried after him. Should this have afflicted them? Oh, that all men would cry after him! Such a blessed annoyance should be longed after by compassionate hearts among the Lord's servants. The disciples were, however, driven to appeal to their Master, and though that was something, it was not much.

Possibly they meant their complaint to help the woman by obtaining an answer for her one way or another; but their words have a cold look — "Send her away." May we never be so selfish as to feel troubled by inquirers! May we never send them away ourselves by cold looks and harsh words!

Still the disciples were not able to neglect her; they were forced to plead with Jesus about her; they came and besought him. If Christian people are apparently unsympathetic let us warm them into feeling by our persistent fervency.

Matthew 15:24. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

When Jesus did speak, it was not to her, but to his disciples. She heard the word, and felt it to be a side blow which struck heavily at her hopes. She was not of "the house of Israel"; she owned that she could not number herself among the sheep; he was not sent to her; how could he go beyond his mission? It would have been small wonder if she had retired in despair.

On the contrary, she redoubled her pleading.

Matthew 15:25. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, lord, help me.

Instead of retiring she came nearer, and she “worshipped him. ” It was well done. She could not solve the problems of the destiny of her race, and of the Lord’s commission; but she could pray. She knew little about the limitations of Messiahship, but she knew that the Lord had boundless power. If, as a shepherd, he may not gather her, yet, as Lord, he may help her. The divine nature of Christ is a well-spring of comfort to troubled hearts.

Her petition was brief, yet comprehensive; it came hot from her heart, and went straight to the point. Her daughter’s case was her own, and so she cried, “Lord, help me.” Lord, help us to pray as she did.

Matthew 15:26. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.

At length he turns, and gives a reply to her pleading; but it is not a cheering one. How hard its language! How unlike our Lord’s usual self! And yet how true! How unanswerable! Truly “it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs. ” Of course privileges must not be given to those who have no right to them, nor must reserved boons be wasted upon the unworthy. The blessing sought is as bread for children, and the Canaanites were no more members of the chosen family than so many dogs. Their heathen character made them like dogs as to uncleanness. For generations they had known no more of the true God than the dogs which roam the streets. Often they and other Philistine tribes had snapped as dogs at the heels of the Lord’s people. The woman had probably heard such phrases as this from proud Jewish bigots, but she had not expected it from the Lord.

Matthew 15:27. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.

It was humbly spoken: “Truth, Lord. ” It was bravely spoken; for she found food for faith in the hard crusts of our Lord’s language. Our Lord had used a word which should be rendered “little dogs ”, and she caught at it. Little dogs become the playmates of the children; they lie under the table, and pick up the fragments which fall to the ground from the table of their little masters. The householder so far takes the little dog under his care as to allow him to be under the table. If, Gentile dog as she is, she may not be shepherded as one of the flock, she will be content to be tolerated as one of the household in the character of a little dog; for then she will be allowed the crumbs which fall from the children’s bread, from the dog’s little masters’ table . Great as was the blessing which she sought, it was but a crumb to the Lord’s bounty, and to Israel’s portion, and therefore she begged to have it, dog as she owned herself to be.

Let us accept the worst character that the Scripture gives us, and still find in it an argument for hope.

Matthew 15:28. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Our Savior loves great faith, and grants to it whatever it desires. Her faith was great comparatively: for a heathen woman, and for one who knew so little of the Savior, she was surpassingly strong in faith. But her faith was not only great comparatively it was great positively: to believe in a silent Christ, in one who treats her with a rebuff, in one who calls her a dog, is exceedingly great faith, measure it how you will. Few of us have a tithe as much faith in our Lord as this woman had. To believe that he can cure her daughter at once, and to cling to him for that boon, is faith which sets even the Lord a wondering, and he cries, “O woman, great is thy faith! ” How splendid the reward: “Be it unto thee even as thou wilt ”! According to her will her daughter’s cure was immediate, perfect, and enduring. Oh, for like precious faith, especially for such faith in reference to our sons and daughters! Why should we not have it? Jesus is the same, and we have even more reasons for trusting in him than the Canaanitess could have had.

Lord we believe; help thou our unbelief, and make our children whole.

MATTHEW 15:29-39 THE KING GIVES ANOTHER BANQUET

Matthew 15:29. And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

He was always on the move: he “went about doing good.” He had gone to the border of the land: he was soon back again to headquarters. He wastes not a moment. He does not stay to be congratulated upon his success, but hastens to other work; and so we often read, “And Jesus departed from thence.” How he loved the mountains and the sea! By the lake of Galilee he again chooses out a rising knoll, selects a standing place with ground around it for an assembly, and opens another session of his ministry of mercy. He sat down there, for he had set his heart upon blessing the people on that convenient spot. In imagination we see him taking his seat, and then speaking ex cathedra, from the rising ground, “nigh unto the sea of Galilee.” The mountain’s side was free to all, and none could complain of trespass, and it was far enough from busy towns to escape the noise of necessary labor. See how the people crowd! Our Lord’s presence will not long be unnoticed, though no sound of churchgoing bell gave notice of a service. As a preacher he never lacked a congregation. Where he sat down the people came: if he “went up into a mountain” they climbed after him. If we preach Jesus in the most out-of-the-way village, in a region almost inaccessible, we shall not be left without hearers.

Matthew 15:30, 31. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

Still the same story. The magnet always attracts. The crowd increased in volume. “Great multitudes came unto him.” They seem to spring up from the earth, and swarm from the sea: they are so soon about our Lord that there is no interval wherein he might rest. The sickness which they bring before him is still more varied than in former times. What a list of patients!

What a gathering of miseries to one spot! The expectation of the people remains at flood-tide; they have the sick with them, and they “cast them down at Jesus’ feet”: leaving them with him in full confidence. The healing power continues to flow in full force: that one sentence is a grand summary of his marvelous cures: “He healed them.” This time the result is a greater degree of wonder among the crowd, attended by a gracious savor of praise to Israel’s God: “They glorified the God of Israel.” It was evident to them that Jehovah had remembered and visited his people, and was healing their sicknesses, and so for the moment they gave him glory. What must it have been to be an eyewitness of such a scene of healing and of worship! What an education for the apostles! What stay for their faith in trying days after their Master was taken from them!

Lord, when we experience a revival of true religion, we behold the greatness of thy healing power in the spiritual world, and we, therefore, glorify the God of Israel — the God of the covenant, the God of wrestling prayer, the God of all grace.

Matthew 15:32. Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting lest they faint in the way.

History repeats itself. We shall be wise to note the variations. What Jesus has done once he can and will do again and again, should need arise. In fact, one mercy is the promise of another. Our Lord is here the first to speak upon the way of dealing with the vast famishing crowd: the disciples do not come to him about the business, but he begins the conversation. In every case his heart is first, and in this case his speech is so. “Then Jesus called his disciples unto him.” They are to be co-workers, and so he consults them, making them members of his privy-council. He has all tenderness, and can truly say, “I have compassion on the multitude.” Whether he moves in a matter of distress or not, his heart is always compassionate, and he thinks of the people’s present fasting, and possible fainting. His compassion is the spring which sets his power in motion. The crowds had continued following him, and he could not but pity the need which arose out of their perseverance in listening to his teaching. These people had endured a three days’ fast, or at least scantiness of food, to hear him preach. What preaching it must have been! But the great Teacher cares for their bodies as well as for their souls, and will not feel content to feed their minds only. From the usual point of view their lack of provision was their own concern: they had gathered of their own accord, and they could not reasonably look to him to give them both board and instruction for nothing; but his great heart could not consent to let them faint: he would not even innocently be the cause of injury to one of them. He solemnly declares, “I will not send them away fasting.” He would not have his servants indifferent to the sufferings of the poor, even as to the bread which perisheth. We may be doubly sure that he will not long allow any earnest hearer to faint through spiritual hunger. He may make us wait to awaken appetite; but he will not in the end dismiss us unfed. He loves not to let the hungry famish; he fears “lest they faint in the way.” If any of us are coming near to

that state, he perceives it, and will interpose. Let us cultivate an appetite for heavenly food, and Jesus will supply its cravings.

Matthew 15:33. And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

On this second occasion we might have hoped for better things from the disciples; but they are in the old rut; as doubtful as ever, and as much guilty of forgetting their Lord's power. He said, "I will not send them away fasting", and they answer his gracious declaration with a hard and chilling question. Note how they forget what HE would do, and dote upon what they cannot do. "Whence should we have so much bread?" Who said anything about "We"? The only good point in their speech is their associating themselves with their Lord at all; but even there they take too prominent a place. They think of their own poverty, of the wilderness, of the "so much bread," and of the "so great a multitude"; and they forget their "so great" Lord. Are we not too much like them? Are we sure that we are even as wise as they were? We fear not.

Matthew 15:34. And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

The Lord accepts their association, and says, "How many loaves have ye?" Small as their store was, and utterly insignificant for the work proposed, he allows them to contribute it towards his grand design. They make a rapid inventory, and they speak of it in mournful tones: "Seven loaves, and a few little fishes." Much like our own poor stock-in-trade for holy service. The loaves were by no means such masses of food as we intend by the English word; they were merely thin cakes. The fishes were few and little; more bones than anything else. So are our abilities slender, and marred with many disabilities; yet we must put all that we have into the common stock, and it will be enough in the hands of him who worketh all things.

Matthew 15:35. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

The people are prepared for the festival by willingness to obey. What they had seen of our Lord's miraculous power awakened expectation, and created readiness to follow his lead. There is generally a preparedness of mind when Jesus is about to work his wonders of grace. Lord, cause our people to be ready "to sit down on the ground" at thy feast of grace!

Matthew 15:36. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

He did as aforetime. His way is perfect, and so there was no need for altering it. "He took the seven loaves and the fishes." They only made one handful for him. This shows us that our slender abilities must be placed at his disposal, and in his wonderworking hands. He does not disdain to carry the bread and the fish, though he bears up both heaven and earth. His giving thanks at an outdoor meal should teach us not to eat without thanksgiving. The breaking teaches that there must be expenditure of talent, and that there should be a crumbing down of truth to suit human mouths. His giving the provision into many hands shows that nothing is to be retained in store, but all must be distributed among the many. Our Lord Jesus again honored his disciples by making them the servitors by whom he reached the multitude. Lord, use us: for if we have neither loaf nor fish, we have grilling hands.

Matthew 15:37. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.

The feast was carried out in a manner so orderly, and with provision so bountiful, that all ate to satisfaction: even little children had their bread and fish. The remainder, the broken food, was too good to waste, and so it was taken up in baskets for future use. The God of abundance is yet the God of frugality. We want not, but also we waste not. Baskets are always to be had: the difficulty is to fill them. Here the baskets corresponded to the number of the loaves; in the former banquet they corresponded to the number of the apostles. The blessing which rewards service may bear a relation to the workers or to the original supply which they contributed, according to the manner of comparison. In both cases of feeding the multitude, that which was in store after use was greater than

that which was at first possessed. The more we give the more we have. May not some of us be poor because we have given so little away? Might not the most gifted have had more gifts by this time if they had unselfishly laid out what hat they have for the good of others?

Matthew 15:38. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

Here is no desire to swell out the number, to make the wonder greater. In some religious statistics the tale would be soon told if the women and children were left out, for they are the bulk of the attendants. In the Bible we find the people counted by the number of the males, and Matthew when he took taxes was accustomed so to levy them: that plan is followed here There is no reason why the women and children should be omitted in our enumerations nowadays, since the whole method of census taking has been altered, and both sexes are now included. As the men were the greatest eaters, and the most conspicuous persons, they are counted; and though the rest of the guests were not numbered they were all nourished, which is the main matter.

39. And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

Our Lord was ever earnest to send the crowds home: he desired not to detain them from their daily labor. He does not want them to attend him as a guard of honor, or as enthusiastic processionists: he speeds away from their praises. He took ship. Like a shuttle through the loom, he crosses and recrosses the lake. He comes "into the coasts of Magdala. " Was he seeking out Mary of Magdala? He had some errand of mercy there. It was soon accomplished, for he was off to sea again. Our Lord was largely a seafaring man. Let sailors run up Christ's colors, and sail under his command. O Lord Jesus, I would traverse the sea of life with thee as my pilot, owner, and captain!