

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MARK 8:1-9. K.J.V

Contents:

An admonition, a consolation and doctrines.

Mark 8:1-9

In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.

PART 1

THE ADMONITION AND CONSOLATION

To-day's Gospel presents to us again both the doctrine and the consolation against the temptation in caring for the necessities of this life, or the temporal support and maintenance of the Church upon the earth. And faith belongs here since Christ came not for the purpose of establishing a government that may be called a political or a domestic kingdom, which were long ago established by God and given for the purpose of meeting our bodily needs. And reason itself here teaches how and from what source we can bring it to pass that everyone in his station may enjoy a livelihood, peace and protection, so that one may see before his eyes and have in his hands all the necessities of life that he needs

to maintain the temporal government. Therefore this did not claim the attention of Christ since it was not a part of his calling and office; but as his kingdom was to be a different government, in which all persons in all callings and offices, high and low, as sinners condemned before God to everlasting death, should be helped to the divine, eternal kingdom and life; the spiritual kingdom had to engage his attention while he passed by the other two, the civil, and the domestic.

2. Therefore it had to follow that his disciples, preachers and servants would have to suffer poverty because they could not outside of their service and office seek their livelihood as the rest of the world does, nor hope to become rich from their calling; in addition, that they, aside from this, would be persecuted by the world, which would oppose their preaching because it would not be in harmony with their understanding and prejudices. And thus the Christians in the world could not depend upon any sure guarantee for their peaceful life and protection; but had to live continually in uncertainty because of the world, and felt in danger and as restless as the waves of the sea because of that which they already had or might have. But should they have enough to eat and to drink and a place and a room where to live, they could not expect it from any other one than alone from Christ.

3. Now Christ knows this very well, therefore he arms and comforts his disciples with these and like examples and sayings in order that they might not despair. Although his kingdom has nothing to do with eating and drinking, building and caring for the needs of the body; yet they should not die from hunger. And this he again confirms in the passage of Matthew 6:33. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." For by to-day's Gospel he proves that they, who followed him to hear his preaching, and followed him so faithfully that they continued with him three days in the desert, could not now very well return out of the desert without fainting and coming to poverty, need and distress on account of his Word. Yet since they sought first the kingdom of God and Christ had previously preached, prayed and accomplished that which pertains to the righteousness of God, there must follow also that which pertains to the body in order that they may learn to believe that they would not come to want and that they should expect from him all his Church needs for the maintenance of her bodily or external existence upon the earth.

4. It is true that in all ages of the Church two things have done and are doing great harm, namely, poverty and riches. For in the first place, we see the apostles and true bishops and preachers in such straightened circumstances, that no one gave them anything and they themselves were not able to acquire anything; hence everybody felt shy of such an office and no one wished to enter it. In the second place, when the church became extremely wealthy through great endowments and stipends and sat in all luxury, the ministers themselves neglected the office of preaching and the care of souls, and themselves became lords. 5. Just so it is also at present: Where true pastors and preachers are so poorly supported that no one donates anything to them, and moreover what they

have is snatched out of their mouths by a shameless and unthankful world, by princes, noblemen, townsmen and farmers, so that they with their poor wives and children must suffer need, and when they die leave behind them pitiable, rejected widows and orphans. By this very many good-hearted and very clever people are more and more discouraged from becoming pastors and preachers. For all arts, trades and callings in life serve to the end that we may through them fortify ourselves against hunger and poverty; but with the office of the ministry the contrary is the case, whoever will per, form its duties faithfully, must expose himself to danger and poverty.

6. From this then will follow the ruin of the Church, in that the parishes will stand vacant, the pulpits be neglected and again preachers arrive who seek not faithfully God's Word nor the kingdom of Christ; but who think, as they preach, what the people will gladly hear, so that they may continue in that direction and again become rich; and in this manner things will again go to ruin. Therefore also at present the great and powerful, especially the nobility, plan to keep their pastors and preachers under their feet in order that they may not again become rich, and lord it over them as they formerly experienced and are now overcautious. But they will not be able to bring it about as they plan.

7. How shall we now act in this matter and from what source shall we obtain preachers and pastors in order that the kingdom of Christ may be perpetuated? For neither poverty nor riches is good for the Church; mere poverty, hunger and anxiety the preachers cannot suffer; great possessions and riches they cannot stand. Poverty hinders the development of their personality; riches are in the way of them performing the duties of their work and office. But wherever it thus happens that support is not given, and the pulpit and the office of the pastor are left vacant, then will the world also see what it will have to enjoy because of such action. For if each will consider the welfare only of his own house and seek how he may maintain himself and no one inquires how the Word of God and the office of the ministry are to be perpetuated, then will God also say as he said in the prophecy of Haggai 1:4-11, where the people also left the house of the Lord desolate, neglected God's Word and the service of the temple, so that the priests and servants of the temple had to resort to work as farmers and learn to do other things, by which they could support themselves because nothing was given for their office and service.

Therefore he speaks thus: *"Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your ceiled houses, while this house lieth waste? Now therefore thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah. Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith Jehovah of hosts. Because of*

my house that lieth waste, while ye run every man to his own house. Therefore for your sake the heavens withhold the dew, and the earth withholdeth its fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the grain, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands.”

8. Behold, this is the punishment for despising the office of the ministry, when such punishment was the most gracious as it has been still in our day, and I would to God, that it might continue so. But when we esteem the Word of God so lightly and the ministers and preachers are so poorly supported that they are compelled to forsake their office and seek their bread through other occupations, and thereby also discourage others from entering this office, who otherwise are gifted for it and inclined to it; God not only sends famine and other great national calamities as now appear before our eyes, in order that no one's purse may retain anything and no blessing and no provisions remain. But he takes the Word and the true doctrine entirely away, and in their stead permits fanatical spirits and false teachers to enter among them, by whom they are led astray and deceived before they are aware of it both as to their souls and property, and for their neglect they must contribute richly and most bountifully.

9. Therefore the world should be advised, if it will take advice, that the lords, the princes, the countries, the cities and all in general make efforts to provide a little for the necessaries of the house of God and the kingdom of God, as they must do for other offices and arts, in order that they may give their whole attention to them and obtain their daily bread from them, which are needed much more than other offices and arts. While one officer or judge is sufficient, likewise one jurist or physician can meet the needs of one city or more, and for a time of the entire country; we must have thousands of preachers for the various countries since the parishes and districts are so many; for children are daily born who must be baptized and educated, learn God's Word and become Christians. From what source can ministers be had, if they are not reared and educated? Then the churches must either stand vacant and the people scatter and go astray, or the people receive and suffer from coarse mulelike characters and corrupters of the Word.

10. But woe unto all who contributed to bring about such a state or have not tried to prevent it, that God's house had to become desolate; much more, however, those who have discouraged and hindered others from entering the ministry, or continuing in it; for such characters are worse than the Jews or Turks. However they are not to be excused because they allowed themselves to be discouraged from entering the ministry on account of poverty, for their greatest lack was in faith that Christ would notwithstanding give them their daily bread or nourishment for their bodies, which, although at times may be scanty and bitter, yet, you are to remember on the other hand how very much greater

treasure it is that one receives a piece of bread into his hands in an exceptional way and through the special blessing of God, than all the riches and fullness of the world.

11. Therefore the civil government should especially try to do something here and to be helpful to our children and posterity, and not withdraw its hand and by its example hinder and deter others, and do Christendom an irreparable damage. How will you give an answer to God if you through your cursed avarice retard or hinder a single soul in its salvation; I will say nothing about hindering a whole city or country by your example, so that they may no longer possess the Word of God and the preaching of it? And he must indeed be a cruel, unmerciful and cursed person who does not help his own children in this way, much more if he hinders it. For if we wish to be Christians we should positively know that we are called to do this, and it is the command of God that we all do it with both our hands and with all our powers, that the house of God may not become desolate nor the pulpits stand vacant and his kingdom cease, and that both we ourselves and the young people be not robbed of their salvation.

12. To be sure, in the Old Testament it was obligatory on everybody, and commanded by Moses, that the tenth part or the tithe be given for this purpose from all their income, Leviticus 27:30f. How much more should we Christians do for this cause, which is the most necessary, and without which no one upon the earth gives and does anything that Christ's kingdom may continue built up, so that we allow his servants to eat with us in order that we may remain in the same kingdom of God, and give such grace and salvation to our children as an inheritance. If we do not do this then he will as a reward of our ingratitude put an end to our avarice and devouring spirit, so that we ourselves will soon perish; because such great possessions and provisions we have not, but that God can permit rust to enter among them through famine, Turkish war and other national plagues and everything be consumed, ravished or otherwise destroyed in a single year.

13. Thus will Christ warn us first of all here through his own example that everyone is required to help the kingdom of God and his Word with temporal provisions for the body; in case he himself cannot or will not be a minister of the Gospel.

14. Following this he also comforts those who are in the ministerial office, that they become not distressed or alarmed through their present want or poverty; but that they may know that Christ cares for them and will nourish them even in their poverty and will never permit them to suffer need and want, but will finally provide the richer bounty for them; yea, he has already thought of all things before and provided for them before they thought from what source they should obtain what they need.

15. For he shows indeed forcibly in this example that he is a rich and powerful lord and provider; yea, he is a rich miller and baker, better than any other upon the earth that has learned his trade perfectly. Yes, he does indeed very much work instantly and aside from and without any human help. He plows, harvests, threshes, grinds and bakes in a twinkling of the eye. For it is indeed a miracle and beyond the comprehension of reason

that so many thousand men, not counting the women and children, were fed with seven loaves, that they all were satisfied, and yet some were left over; but he did it so quickly by one word, when he only touched the bread and gave to his disciples to distribute; there is at once ground to flour, baked and everything prepared for so many thousand persons and even more. He must be a fine king (as the five thousand said whom he also fed in a like manner, John 6:14), him we would also wish to have as our king, who should lead a multitude of people to the field and care for them, so that one could at all times reach into the basket or into the pocket, and richly feed and pay a whole multitude.

16. Now he can do that and in him we have such a king. Where he reaches there all is full, and where he gives there all must be sufficient and overflowing. Thus in Matthew 17:27 he told Peter to go and take a shekel out of the mouth of a fish. Who prepared or minted the silver there or who would seek there in the water and even in the mouth of the fish for money? But he can create it and take it when and where and as he wishes; yea, can also bring bread and water out of the rock with which to feed the whole world; for we see everywhere he does so daily and everything that the world has comes about only by such miracles which are not less miraculous, as St. Augustine says, than this miracle.

17. We are, to be sure, thus familiar with the fact that corn grows yearly out of the earth, and through this familiarity we are so blinded that we do not esteem such work. For what we see daily and hear, that we do not regard as miraculous; and yet it is even as great; yea, if one should speak correctly, it is a greater miracle that God should give us corn out of the sand and the stone, than that he should here feed a multitude with seven loaves. For what is the dry sand but crushed stones, or a stone other than sand and earth welded together; but how can bread which we eat come out of stones, and yet it grows only out of the sand of the earth? In like manner everything that grows, and all the animals give to us, each according to his own nature; whence does it come but out of the earth and dust?

18. These are even the miracles which have been established from the beginning of the world and daily continue, so that we are entirely overwhelmed by them, without our eyes and senses feeling them, since they are so common that God must at times, as he does here, perform not a greater, but a special miracle, which is extraordinary by which he awakens us and through such an individual and special miracle he shows us and leads us into the daily miracles of the whole world.

19. No farmer can deny that his corn grows out of mere stones, as also Moses in Deuteronomy 32:13 says: "He made him ride on the high places of the earth, and he did eat the increase of the field; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock." What does that mean? How can honey and oil grow out of rock and stone? Now it does happen that both corn and trees which bear the sweetest fruits are rooted in stones and sand, and out of that they grow and from nowhere else do they receive their sap and strength. If it should take place before our eyes now that oil and honey should flow out of a column of rock, then the whole world would speak of this as

the miracle of miracles; but since we daily walk over the fields and land where they grow before our eyes, there we see nothing and appreciate nothing.

20. Since we now cast to the winds the daily works of God, which are nothing but miracles, he must cause us to gape at these special and like miracles, and let them be proclaimed as special miracles in order that a Christian may let such miracles be to him a writing and a book, from which he learns to behold all the works of God, and satisfies his heart with them, and thinks thus: Why shall I be worried with anxiety and care on account of temporal need and provision? From what source does God give us the corn in the field and all fruits, since the world with all her wisdom is not able to create a straw, a leaf or a little flower? Since Christ, my Lord and God, does such things daily, why then shall I be worried, or doubt as to whether he can or' will sustain my bodily existence?

21. Here you may reply: Yes, how does it then come about since he is such a king who feeds the whole world so bountifully, that he permits his Christians so often to suffer from want and poverty in the world? For he should indeed care for his own people bountifully above all others. Answer: Here one must understand how the kingdom of Christ is constituted; for he will by this show us, as I said at the beginning, that his kingdom upon the earth is preeminently not a temporal kingdom, which consists in how we here upon the earth may eat, drink, keep house, care for the body, and moreover where all the necessaries of this life must be regulated and provided for. But he has founded a spiritual kingdom, in which one should seek and find divine and eternal possessions, and so constituted the same that it would be richly provided for and perpetuated by the Word of God, the sacraments, the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and that it would not lack in anything that serves us in securing and maintaining our eternal life. Therefore he lets the world in its government have and take the necessaries and provisions of life, and thereby provides richly for it. But Christ exhorts his Christians to place their hope and consolation not in temporal things, but to seek the kingdom of God, in which they shall have sufficient forever and shall be truly rich. That is the first.

22. In the second place Christ desires to teach his Christians to exercise faith in the things which pertain to the temporal life and to their temporal possessions, in a way that they see him here even in their hands and expect from him also the necessaries of this life; for since the Church upon the earth is his Church and shall remain so, he must provide for her, for her body, for her food, her drink, her clothing, her buildings, her locations and other necessary things. Yea, he has indeed created all that the world contains and produces for the sake of pious Christians; he gives and maintains all still only for their sake, as long as the world stands, in order that they should richly enjoy these things in this life, and have no need. But since the devil rules in the world and he is the enemy of Christ and of his Church, and since they themselves do not seek the things of this world, they must suffer that to be taken out of their mouths, and robbed of, which belongs to them. Here now Christ must help his Church and give where she suffers need and want, that she may continue to exist, that it may be called miraculous giving; and the Christians

acknowledge that it is given by him and that he shows forth continually in his Christendom such special miracles, so that they notwithstanding will have something to eat, drink, etc. , even if the world gives nothing and grants no favors; but takes from her, and is jealous and hateful because of what God gives her.

23. Behold, we should now also learn to believe that we have a Lord in the person of Christ, who provides for our stomachs and for our temporal lives, and thereby thrusts aside and conquers the cares of unbelief. For he excites us through many examples to faith, as it is his earnest wish that we should be a people, who have no care for our own person as pertains to both the spiritual and bodily, or the temporal and eternal (for here he is not speaking concerning the cares of the office or of the labor which is commanded everyone by God and laid upon him, in which he is to be true and faithful); in order that we may do with cheerful hearts and with confidence in him what is commanded us, especially that which belongs to the kingdom of God, and if need and want stare us in the face, that we permit such things to be commanded us. And a Christian should comfort and strengthen himself thus: I know, and have learned from the Gospel that I have a Lord who can make out of one loaf as many loaves as he will, and he does not need in order to do it either a farmer or a miller or a baker, and he gives to me when and as much as I require, although I do not at once know or understand, yea, do not even think about it, how or when and whence he shall come to my help.

24. The text of this gospel also now shows how Christ feels and speaks when he sees the people who follow him and cannot return home without fainting, when he calls the disciples to himself and has a little counsel with them, he begins and says: “I have compassion on the multitude.” And he adds the cause when he says: *“Because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat,”* etc.

PART 2

A. THE CHIEF DOCTRINES

25. Here tell me, if the multitude had sent an embassy to Christ to report on their need, could they have formulated their report as well as Christ himself here thinks it out and holds it before his disciples? For how would they or could they paint it better or allege stronger reasons to move him, than to have said: Oh, beloved Lord, have compassion on the poor multitude of people, men, women and children, who have followed thee so far in order to hear thee? In the second place, consider that they have now remained and continued with thee for three days. In the third place, remember that they have nothing to eat and are in the desert. In the fourth place, if you send them away fasting they must faint on the way before they arrive home, especially the weak men and the women and children. In the fifth place, consider also that some have come far, etc. Behold, Christ reflected upon all this himself before anyone speaks with him and has himself formed the prayer so beautifully in his own heart. Yes, he is distressed on their account before they think of praying to him, and earnestly discussed with the disciples their need and gave counsel what to do in their behalf.

26. What then is all this but a purely living sermon, proving and witnessing that Christ is so earnestly and heartily concerned about us, and before we can propose anything to him, he looks into our hearts better than we ourselves can, so that no mortal person could speak with another more heartily. For he does not wait until someone says to him: Oh, Lord, have compassion on the multitude, think how they have held out, how far they are from home, etc. Yes, he says, I have compassion on them already and have thought over it all before. But listen, he says to the disciples, what counsel do you give, what shall we do for them in order that the multitude may be fed?

27. Now this counseling and consulting with the disciples took place, first, in order that he should thus reveal his own heart and thoughts. For it must not remain hid in his heart only, that he had compassion and anxiety for the people; but it should come to light so that it could be heard and seen, and we might learn to believe that we have the same Christ who is ever concerned about our bodily needs, and in whose heart are ever written in living letters the words, "I have compassion on my poor people," and he shows it in his acts and works, so that he earnestly wishes that we only acknowledge it and hear this Word of the Gospel, as if he spoke it yet this hour and daily whenever we feel our need, yea, much sooner than we ourselves begin to complain about it. For he is ever, and remains forever, the same Christ and has the very same heart, thoughts and words concerning us as he had at that time, and has neither yesterday nor at any other time been different, and will not to-day nor tomorrow become a different Christ. Now here we have a very beautiful picture and tablet which paint to us the very depths of the Savior's heart, that he is a faithful, merciful Lord, to whom our needs appeal to the very quick, and he sees deeper into our wants than we are able to pray and present to him. Shame on our abominable unbelief, for we hear and see this, and yet in spite of it, we cannot fully trust in Christ.

28. Yes, that is just the reason he began this interview and asked the disciples for counsel, namely, that we might see our own unbelief and foolishness and chastise ourselves. For here you see how he considers their need much better and more fully, and gives counsel concerning it, than we ourselves are able to do, and no person in his own danger or need can give Christ counsel how he might be rescued out of his distress. And although Christ had already deliberated and concluded what he would do, yet he asks them for their advice through which they see how he cares for them and what they themselves are able to advise him. Here it is revealed what the counsel of men can do when men undertake to be the counsellors of God and of Christ. Here they all stand like the musicians who have ruined the dance, they have gone in their human wisdom and considered it with their financiers. Here are four thousand men and indeed as many women and children. Where should one receive sufficient for them to eat, especially here in the desert, unless they eat grass and hay?

29. Thus you hear the answer of human wisdom when appealed to for counsel and how different it is from faith; for it does not know anything to say to this, than to conclude in a common and dry manner, there is no way to help the situation. That is what nature and reason at all times propose where need and want reign; when they should trust in God and expect from him counsel and help, they fall instantly upon the blasphemous words: Why, it is impossible, it is a lost cause, etc. When the peril of death and danger visit us, then reason thinks and concludes instantly, it is not possible to live; when there is no bread in the house, it is impossible to ward off hunger; and nothing but mere doubt is where reason cannot see at once before its eyes and grasp that with which the situation can be helped. Reason is not so wise as to think that Christ knows yet of some counsel and help, since he himself takes interest in our distress and does not doubt, but speaks as he does here, as one who will counsel and help, and not permit his people to go from him fasting, and faint on the way.

30. Yes, reason is not pious enough to give Christ this honor, and believe that he knows how to counsel and help more than it realizes, and to confess its lack of understanding and ability, and thus bring the matter home to him and covet his counsel and help. This is why we have so many fools and wish, in case God should deal with us, to reckon and measure in an ordinary way according to our own ability and powers. Therefore where he fails, we must indeed doubt; as here the apostles calculate and measure by their reason their food and provisions over against the great multitude, and their need compared with their ability. Then the only result will be that they are compelled to say: Here there is no other advice to give than that we let them go where they decide, where they may buy and find food; they may do in this matter as they are able, either faint or continue to live.

31. Thus you see also in the disciples and apostles of Christ our great and deep rooted unbelief, what great ignorant fools we are, compared with the counsel and works of God. And we believe nothing at all unless it goes according to our thoughts and ideas, and think he knows no counsel and does nothing for us where we are not able first to see and

calculate how it is possible. Yet he deals with us thus for the very purpose of showing us where our counsel, wisdom and ability end, so that he does a much higher order of work for us than we are able to think and esteem as possible, or can pray for and wish; so that if he should not deal with us in any other way than according to our thoughts and counsels, he would never be able to do any divine work or be able to prove anything divine to us, and every minute we would have to doubt, sink and perish without God.

32. Therefore it is also much better that he, without our counsel, yea, contrary to it, should go ahead and do, as the Lord and God of all creatures should do; for we still would not counsel or say anything more on the subject than the apostles here said in this case, that it is impossible and a lost cause, to feed so great a multitude. Yet however he thus shows himself friendly in that he asks them for counsel and lets them advise on the subject and can have patience with them, lets them begin thus in order that they themselves might be forced to see later how foolish they acted and be ashamed of their unbelief since they experienced and saw before their eyes his miracle.

33. From this we should also learn to become an enemy of our unbelief and oppose it, which continually bestirs itself in times of need and danger, and at once despairs of all consolation and help, where it does not see before its eyes help and counsel in our own human strength. But we should accustom ourselves to think that Christ is able to do, and does do, more and greater things than we can understand or believe; for our hands and strength are not indeed created to the end that they should help us to corn and bread in time of famine and want, to life in time of death, and make something out of nothing. But he is the Lord who can do this and does do it as work that comes natural to him. Therefore he says, turn thine eyes and thoughts from your hands and your ability upon me; my fingers are adapted to the end that they should do it. You are Only to believe, and where it is not possible according to your counsel, then let it be possible according to my counsel and my power.

34. This Christ teaches everywhere in all his miracles and still to-day in his wonderful works which he does in his Church. And yet he cannot exalt himself in our estimation to the degree that we in strong confidence and sure courage commit our need to his counsel and power and let it be commended to him; through which we are helped both out of our need and want, and become free from all anxious care and fear, by which we make our need greater and severer than it is in itself. And we have in this a twofold benefit and gain: A peaceful, quiet heart and conscience and in addition consolation and help, and moreover, that we thus render to him the best sacrifice and divine service. On the other hand, if we do not do this, it cannot be agreeable or pleasing to him, and the blame is no one's but our own that we worry and plague ourselves and yet accomplish nothing by such worry; for we must nevertheless let it remain in his power, since no one of us is able even to change a little smallpox mark on his body although he should worry himself to death over it.

35. However, it is still well for us that Christ permits us to be tested and disciplined in this way, and through our vain counsels and suggestions, our struggling and doubting, he teaches us to acknowledge our exigency; otherwise we would never realize that we were in need and would never learn either to believe or to pray. Therefore he shows and reveals here to his disciples their present want and extremity before they themselves think of it.

36. In like manner also for a time God sends us temptation, terror, misfortune and suffering in order that we may feel our need and become conscious how utterly unable we are either to counsel or help ourselves; but he does so that we may learn not to go ahead heedlessly according to our feelings, and say: Ah, whither now? Here all is lost. Where shall we get something? That “whither?” and “where?” take out of thy mouth and heart, and instead, run here to Christ and expect what he will say and give to thee. For the fact that you feel your need will not hurt you; he lets you feel it in order that you may experience and feel also his help, his beneficence and his rescuing power, and that you learn thus to believe and to trust him.

B. OTHER DOCTRINES

37. We have said enough now concerning the summary and central doctrine of to-day’s Gospel. Further there are also given in the history of this Gospel many good points. First, that Christ asks, how many loaves have ye, and he takes the same along with the few fishes, for which he thanks God and says grace, and gives them to his disciples to divide and set before the people. Here he teaches, first, that we should use that which God bestows upon us, however small it may be, and accept it with thanksgiving, and know that Christ will also bless it that it may be efficient and sufficient, yea, even multiply it in our hands; for it is pleasing to God when we acknowledge his gifts and thank him for them, and he adds his blessing so that it becomes better and reaches farther than the great riches and superfluous possessions of the unbelievers; as the Scriptures say in Psalm 37:16, “Better is a little that the righteous hath than the abundance of many wicked.” Thus also Proverbs 10:22, “*The blessing of Jehovah, it maketh rich.*” That is, what is given by God and received with a good conscience. And St. Paul also explains this in 1 Timothy 6:6, “*But godliness with contentment is great gain,*” etc.

38. For what do they have who hold such great possessions without faith and without Christ, and what do they gain, except that they rob themselves of God and his blessings? And besides they are idolators and captives of mammon, so that they dare not touch their own possessions; and they neither let others use them nor do they use them with a good conscience themselves, so that they cannot enjoy the little they eat, because of their avarice and wicked conscience, in which they only think of how to scratch together more and more through their cruel business and trickery; and yet they must ever live in danger and worry, so that they have no peace, neither before God nor before man. They must see and hear, and experience so much with their great wealth and among their own children

and in other ways, that their heart sickens; and thus they throw themselves into the snares and pains of the devil, as he also says, out of which they cannot be delivered.

39. On the other hand St. Paul says: He is truly a rich man who fears God and lives in faith, and is contented in this blessedness with that which God gives him, and he possesses it with God and in honor without injustice or damage to anyone; for he has a very great treasure, called God's blessing, even in his poverty, so that he must still have enough; for he knows that we all have no more out of life than what we eat and drink, and as we say, to our fill and satisfaction. And yet it does not depend upon our anxious care where God does not give success; as Psalm 127:2 says' "It is vain for you to rise up early, to take rest late, to eat the bread of toil (German, care); for so he giveth unto his beloved sleep." And Christ himself in Luke 12:15 says' "*A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*"

40. Therefore a Christian should think much more of a dollar that God gives him than of all the great treasures of the rich misers upon the earth; for he has this beautiful treasure in his own home that is called godliness, and he has enough or he is satisfied, that is, he has a peaceful, quiet heart in God. Thus also Psalm 112:1-3 says of such a pious and godly person' "Blessed is the man that feareth Jehovah, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth' the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his hour; and his righteousness endureth forever." What kind of riches and glory and sufficiency is that, the ungodly world says? What are two dollars in the house and on the farm of a poor Christian who has his house full of children, compared with that of a person who has ten, twenty, fifty thousand dollars in his chest? Yes, and what estimate do you put upon the fact that a pious person has the blessing from God, which you cannot buy either with your hundred thousand dollars nor can you secure it with all the possessions of the world? A dollar with a good conscience is more beautiful in the home and shines more gloriously before God and is of more value to him than all the crowns and kingdoms of empires, which do not enjoy their large possessions with great quiet and with a joyful conscience, and at last are not able to secure from them more than the poorest beggar possesses.

41. But the world will not believe this although it sees it before its own eyes. It goes ever ahead with its raking and scraping together of riches and will let no one be satisfied with what he has, every man desires more than his fellow and seeks riches (as it must naturally follow) by robbing, stealing, oppressing the poor. It also follows from this that there is no blessing or success with such riches; but only the curse of God, misery, misfortune and heart agony.

42. In the second place, Christ commands the disciples to set the loaves before the multitude, by which he shows he will administer his work and gifts through the instrumentality of human agencies. He thus also teaches those who have an office or commission (especially the office of the ministry) and those who stand before others, that

they should, in obedience to Christ, faithfully and conscientiously serve the people by cheerfully and meekly giving of their own and imparting to others what God entrusted and gave to them. And especially does he teach them to be of use and comfort to the poor flock of Christians by their good example of faith and of love, and thus strengthen their faith and love. For he here shows how he gives and will give rich blessings to the end that such office and service may accomplish much good and bring forth much fruit. Just as it takes place here, when they received from Christ not more than seven loaves and a few fishes, and they began to distribute them, he multiplies them more and more in their hands, and it more than reaches, so that there is an abundance left over.

43. Let us also learn that the gifts and good things, which God gives, are not profaned, if they are thus used in helping the poor in acts of charity, as Christ in Luke 6:38 also promises and says: *“Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom.”* And the experiences of many pious people everywhere have shown those who liberally instituted and gave before our time charitable gifts for the ministerial office, schools, the support of the poor, etc. And God gave them for doing so good times, peace and quiet; hence the proverb arose among the people and was confirmed: One loses no time by going to church; giving alms does not impoverish; possessions received unjustly do not increase, etc.

44. Hence one sees in the world to-day the very opposite; since such unsatiable avarice and robbery reign, no one gives anything either to his God or to his neighbor; and everyone only scratches to himself what is given by others, and they even drain the poor people of their very sweat and blood; and God gives us in return as a reward famine, discontent and all kinds of misfortune until at last we devour ourselves among one another, or we all, the rich and the poor, the great and the small, are devoured by others.

45. Let us also notice the last part of this Gospel, what the gathering and the preserving of the broken pieces that remained over, teach us; for it is God’s pleasure that we do not squander his gifts uselessly; but be economical and prudent with them, and use the abundance which he gives faithfully for our benefit and needs, and preserve them for the future when we may further have use for them. That is honoring the precious food and not permitting the crumbs to lay under the table; just as our fathers taught their children from this example and added the proverb: “He who saves when he has will find something when he needs it,” etc.

46. For it is a malignant, shameless vice and great contempt of the gifts of God, that the world is now over-flooded everywhere with cloisters, pomp and expenditure of money for everything far beyond its ability to pay. From this then must indeed follow such robbing, stealing, usury, hoarding and pinching by which the country and the people, rulers and subjects, are ruined as a punishment. For in this no one will be less than another, and neither will the lords allow themselves to be checked, nor are they able to

check others; for since they mass together one vice upon another, so must we be visited with one punishment after another.

47. St. Paul says, 1 Timothy 6:17, “The living God giveth us richly all things to enjoy.” That is certainly true if we use them as given to enjoy, and we should not shamefully expend and destroy that which we have in abundance and cannot enjoy either in our need or in our pleasure, and even if such is expended, ravished and destroyed in an unchristian manner, and later the poor have their little tort, from their teeth by our greed, gluttony and avarice. In this way we merit that God does not permit us to enjoy that which we have raked together, extorted and saved by pinching in great superabundance. For all this is hardly enough with which we can fill the open jaws of hell. No lord has so much land and so many people, no land so much money, that they are able to support one prince more; for a prince must have much more for banking, for sports, for display in dress, etc., than his people and country can afford. The jaws of avarice can devour property of a prince more than a whole city can give him, and yet no person is happy or better because of it. And all is devoured in a heap while there is lack everywhere in those things we need for the church and the school, for the government and the common advantage of all, for our own honor, nourishment and necessities.

48. Summary. It cannot be called any more enjoying the gifts of God, since he gives them so richly and overabundantly to the end for us to enjoy, even if the Elbe and the Rhine flowed with nothing but gold, and all the lords and princes could make their country nothing but mountains of silver. For man will not use them in the praise of God and enjoy them for himself, but only for the dishonor of God and for the destruction of the blessings given. No one has any thought about advising the saving of anything for posterity, but all live as if they would gladly destroy everything at once. In all this work of destruction he will also help us, since we wish nothing different. The explanation of this history is sufficiently treated in the Postil sermon for the Sunday Laetare, where you may review it.

[Content Page](#)



First Page