

THE LOAVES AND THE LAD (Jn. 6:9)

What a day the Saviour has had! The crowds have been gathering to listen and to see Him. They have stayed with Him, and now it is coming near sunset. It's too late for them to buy food ... and all the Saviour has at His disposal is five barley loaves and two small fish (v.9). ... Such a great need, and if He had divided such a meagre portion among them, they would not have had much more than a crumb each!

As we look out into a new year, the forecast is even more bleak! According to most of the financial pundits, an economic recession looms. During the week Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, spoke about how 2012 “poses many great challenges for everyone”. In true political style he assures us, “A country that was at risk of falling prey to the international markets has been pulled back from the brink. ... But that economic rescue mission is not over yet and there is much more we must do.”

In the spiritual realm, we have recently heard David Cameron, the Prime Minister, declare we shouldn't be afraid to say we are a Christian country. He staunchly defended the role of religion in politics and a little speck of light shone onto proceedings when he commented that the Bible in particular was crucial to British values. However, the contribution of Biblical truth and Biblical values has seriously been on the wane as the houses of power determine themselves to establish laws contrary to the expressed truth of God.

And we can look at what is happening throughout our society, and we can wonder to ourselves, what is going on?! At the threshold of a new year hope is in short supply. When will they waken up and understand that it is the righteousness of God that has exalted our nation in the past, and only the righteousness of God can exalt it again!

We are in dire need ... politically, socially, economically ... but especially spiritually. There is a spiritual malnutrition ... and if you want to prove it, stand in front of a children's school assembly and ask the children what Christmas is all about. They'll tell you it's about Santa Claus and the Christmas tree, and about presents. Or, like the card we received from an elderly couple, “Winter Greetings”.

How do you confront such people who are so starving?! ... Then in the more contemporary evangelical scene, we're being directed, “Oh, you've got to give people more than Jn. 3:16, and the message of how Christ died on the cross two thousand years ago ... You have got to change and adapt the Gospel for the modern people.” ... But the danger is that when you change and adapt the Gospel, it is no longer the Gospel of Christ. The simple message does be tampered with by a version that is no longer thoroughly His and consequently, it holds out no eternal hope for the sinner.

The problem is a very difficult one. The contrast between the supply and the demand on that day in the countryside of Galilee is to be compared with the times in which we live too, for the proclamation of the Gospel. There is a far greater spiritual need that it seems we can ever supply. Where would we even start? ... If we had been there with Jesus I guarantee you we would have been the first to say to the Lord, “Lord, the meagre scraps that we have ... *what are they among so many?* ... Let’s consider what the Lord chose to work with! ... v.9 *There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes*

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

How did this young fellow come to be there? ... He was there because of the providence of God. We know absolutely nothing about him, - we do not know his name, we are not told who his parents were, and we are not told if they were with him. We do not know much about him at all ... but he was the right young lad in the right place on that day. *God* had him there with those loaves and fish!

In our hymn book (*Christian Hymns*), we have a section entitled *Providence*. The simple definition of Providence is God’s activity in the world. It relates to His sovereignty, and how all things work in accordance with His command. In this particular section there is a hymn by William Cowper, “Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill, He treasures up His bright designs, and works His sovereign will ... Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.”

William Cowper was training to be a lawyer, and he stayed at the home of his uncle. During that time he fell deeply in love with his uncle’s daughter, - his cousin, - and they wanted to marry. However, William’s uncle considered it inappropriate and he denied them their wish. It left him distraught. In 1763 he went to take a responsible legal job in the House of Lords, and he found it so hard coping that he experienced a time of mental breakdown. He tried to commit suicide on three occasions, and ended up in a mental asylum.

After recovery, he began to write hymns, - such as “There is a fountain filled with blood”, “God moves in a mysterious way”. However, in 1773 he experienced another attack of insanity, imagining that he was not only condemned to hell forever, but also that the Lord was commanding him to make a sacrifice of his own life.

A good friend, Mary Unwin, took care of him and he recovered. However, twenty-two years later she died ... plunging him into another state of depression, out of which he never recovered. ... How could the Lord use someone like William Cowper? ... Yet, He *did*.

On one of the occasions William decided to commit suicide by drowning himself. He called for someone to drive him to the Thames River. However, in the course of the journey, a thick fog came down that night and prevented them from finding the river. Now, imagine not being able to find the Thames River in London! ... After driving around lost for a while, they finally stopped and Cowper got out. ... Where did he get out? On one of the bridges overlooking the Thames? No ... To Cowper's surprise, he found himself on his own door-step: even in the fog God kept him!

That is what *providence* is, - it is God's care and watchfulness over His people ... and I'm sure we could all give accounts of how He has kept and watched over us. We are precious to Him, Mt. 10:30 *the very hairs of your head are all numbered.* 31 *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.* His providence watches over His people, and it also watches over His Church. He will never desert His people. When the Lord Jesus was speaking about the end times, He warned, Lk. 21:16 *ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.* 17 *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.* 18 *But there shall not an hair of your head perish.*

This was **the providence of God** that guided the steps of this young lad to Jesus, to meet the need of the hour.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD

Imagine listening to Jesus imply He and His disciples had an obligation to feed all those people, v.5 *When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?* ... *Multiply the five thousand by two ... maybe even three, and you will come closer to the great multitude of people who were present that day.*

I'm sure the disciples would have been scouring the crowds for anyone with any food to spare ... Yes, some boy with five barley loaves and two small fish ... but you would not have looked at him twice! ... It was enough for a child's lunch, but totally unrealistic and inadequate for the needs of all those people

You might think you have very little to give the Lord in 2012 ... but that is not how He looks at it. That which you have, it was *He* Who gave it to you ... and how do you think He feels if He sees you 'looking down your nose' at what He has given you and you don't count it as very much! ... The servant who was given the one talent had the same responsibility to His Master as the other two had ... one of them was given *twice* as much, the other was given *five* times as much ... but they all *equally* had responsibility for what the Master had given each of them! ... You too can do for the Lord exactly what He gives you to do!

Here is a young lad who was content to remain in obscurity, and the Lord brought him to the front only when it was necessary! Some people always like to be at the front, - taking everyone's attention ... but it is not the Lord's way. He knows who you are, what you have, and He knows when to involve you. There is nothing wrong being in the background, for that is where the Lord has the most of us working!

What if the young boy's name had been included in this story? What if every time he walked down the street people said, "There's the young lad who provided the food for the multitudes"? ... He could have had a plaque outside his door. ... That young lad could have started his own business, and have been an overnight success. But no, **the purpose of God** for his life was to be privileged in God's plan for that day *for Jesus to take all the glory*. ... That was **God's purpose**, and this young boy was not going to steal it from Him! ... **The Providence of God ... The Purpose of God ...**

THE PROVISION OF GOD

Who would ever have thought those loaves and fishes would have fared so well! ... *What are they among so many?* ... Imagine the young fellow standing there listening to these men! He was willing to give all he had, - it wasn't much, - but it was all he had ... and it belonged to Jesus, if He wanted it! ... "It's not much, but here You are, Lord, You can have all I have." In fact, the young fellow was willing to go hungry ... he was not to know what Jesus was about to do! But as far as the disciples were concerned, - and the young boy was standing there, - "What use is that to anybody!"

Does it not teach us we should be careful in each other's company, and especially in the company of children and young people? How are they supposed to grow in the faith, if they cannot see our faith at work? "Sorry, young fellow, toddle away off to that wee corner over there, and enjoy your loaves and your fishes" ... Can't we so often be guilty of discouraging others in the Lord's family! We need to be so careful.

Other churches might be packed full of people of all ages ... look at us, just a wee small number made mostly of people over a certain age ... how would you like someone to say to us, we are past it, and we are no use to the Lord? No, the Lord did more with those believers in Philadelphia, to whom He said, *Rev. 3:8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.* ... Far better having a little strength in the Lord, than having a mighty strength without Him! "All that I am I owe to Thee, Thy wisdom, Lord, has fashioned me; I give my Maker thankful praise, Whose wondrous works my soul amaze. Ere into being I was brought, Thine eye did see, and in Thy thought My life in all its perfect plan Was ordered ere my days began."

The devil is afraid of the ‘small loaves and the small fish’. They don’t look much to anyone else, but he knows what the Lord can do with them! It is so often the case that the things God will honour are the very things men despise. ... Look at how they despised His Son. Look at how they despised His prophets and His apostles. Look at how they have despised His people down through every age ... even until our present day ... and yet, He has promised, **I Sam. 2:30** *them that honour me I will honour.*

Consider this young boy was not forced to give what he had, - the disciples would not have wrestled him to the ground and took it from him, - he freely and willingly offered it to the Master. ... You know what it is like when a child comes to you in the church here, or at home, and they offer you one of their sweets, or some of their crisps, - you might not want any, but you take one because they are so kind as to offer it to you ... This young boy offered all he had to Jesus. *What an example that boy is!*

It is a lesson to young people ... to put Jesus first. The great emphasis nowadays is to get as much for yourself, and to put yourself as number one. But this young person here teaches all young people, - and older people too, - to make sure to put Christ first and you will never lack anything you need.

When the Lord changed the young boy’s lunch into a feast to feed all those thousands, the young boy did not have to worry about his supper that night ... *because he was full too ... and it was the Lord who filled him!*

The Providence of God ... The Purpose of God ... The Provision of God ... Now look what happened ... Jesus took the loaves in His hands, - the hands that would, - just within a few years, - have the nails hammered into them ... These were Jesus’ hands into which the boy placed what he had ...

THE POWER OF GOD

Jesus took what belonged to this boy and He worked a miracle, to the glory of God! None of those disciples could have done what Jesus did. That young boy stood and watched as Jesus took his bread, and he watched as Jesus looked towards Heaven and gave thanks for the gifts given to Him by a young boy. Yes, all eyes were on Jesus! Yes, it had belonged to that young boy, but now all he had belonged to the Lord. ... “His love has no limit, His grace has no measure, His power has no boundary known unto men; for out of His infinite riches in Jesus He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again”.

The young boy did not say to Jesus, when He had worked the miracle, “All that bread is mine. I give it to You in the first place. I want it back so I can sell it and start a good business”. ... No, when Christ takes possession of you, all that you are and have become His! ... “Take my life, and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Take my moments and my days ... Take my hands, ... Take my voice ... Take my lips ... Take my silver and my gold ... Take my intellect ... Take my will ... Take my heart ... Take my love Take myself, and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee”. ... Is it just a hymn ... or does the Lord know you mean the words you sing?

I’m going off to Nigeria in a fortnight’s time. Am I looking forward to it? I’m looking forward to doing the Lord’s work in another part of this world, with people who belong to the same family of God. ... When the Lord clearly opens up a door to serve Him, and He makes all the provisions so clearly ... and if He sees fit to use someone like me in a situation like that ... well, I’m so privileged ... yes, just as privileged as that young boy ... that Jesus can use even me with my ordinary loaves and fishes!

I reckon if that young boy had fifty loaves and twenty fishes he would have given them all to the Lord ... because the Lord had already worked in that boy’s heart a miracle even before He made the food to feed all those thousands! ... And if the boy had given the five loaves and two fishes to the disciples they might not have accepted them (“what use are these?!”) ... but Jesus accepted them! They were *dedicated* to Jesus, and Jesus *consecrated* them in His service and for His glory!

In fact, there is a very simple word in the Greek, - so simple you would miss it, - and yet it adds something more beautiful to what happened here. ... In English, our version begins with the word ‘and’, so the Greek word should be και (v.11), but instead, it is the word δέ, - another very simple and equally ordinary word that can so easily be overlooked, - but δέ more correctly is to be translated ‘*therefore*’ ... *Therefore* Jesus took the loaves that were so willingly brought to Him, and so readily presented. Simple as they were, He had need of them ... and that was why, - in the providence of God, - that was what that young boy was ‘*there for*’. ... He watched as Christ blessed his ‘ordinary’ gift, - in the grand scheme of things, they were nothing ... and yet Jesus knew what He could make out of them. Augustine put it very simply, “God loves us, for what we are becoming”.

What you give to God, He will bless you with more than you can imagine. Preachers often talk about how we need to give Him our money, and that is very true, - His work needs it ... But also think about something else ... Maybe you are very busy during the week, - you have hardly a couple of hours to yourself. ...

Well, your time and your energies are a gift from God and He has more than a claim and a right to expect you to spend them in His company and in the company of His people.

... What if you only gave to your work or to your family an hour or two a week ... how would you fare? I don't think it would go unnoticed, and you might be invited into your boss's office to discuss it you working practise! You and I, believer, are the people God depends upon to feed the hungry. Like this young boy, we have been blessed with a portion of what *they* need also ... There are thousands of them in Kirkcaldy who are starving spiritually, and they don't know where to go to find the food that satisfies.

Some of them are feeding themselves on drugs, alcohol, chasing after wealth and other pursuits, even religion ... and they pass up and down our street and it would never cross their minds to find food in here. ... When they pass a 'chip shop' they can smell the aroma ... Paul told the Ephesians that when the unsaved come upon the people of God, we should be walking in such a way that they notice coming from us a sweetsmelling savour (Eph. 5:2)

Before Jesus worked any miracle on the loaves and the fish, He prayed ... Miracles are the consequence of heartfelt prayer coming from God's people. ... The Lord's work cannot be done without prayer. ... Make a point at the start of this New Year to join God's people here in prayer. Any church is only as good and as effective as its prayer meeting ... Jesus prayed first, and then the miracle happened!

Spurgeon also likened himself to this young boy, he told his congregation, "When I had a letter sent to me by the deacons of the church at New Park Street, to come up to London to preach, I sent it back by the next post, telling them that they had made a mistake, that I was a lad of nineteen years of age, happy among a very poor and lowly people in Cambridgeshire, who loved me, and that I did not imagine that they could mean that I was to preach in London. But they returned it to me, and said that they knew all about it, and I must come. Ah, what a story it has been since then, of the goodness and lovingkindness of the Lord!"

But, you know, the miracle of the loaves and the lad comes to its climax not in only seeing the baskets full to overflowing, surely it comes to its pinnacle when Christ was seen by the crowds to be glorified (v.14). Everything else faded into the background, **Jn. 3:30 He must increase, but I must decrease.** ... And you will notice also that every last fragment of those loaves was gathered and brought back to the Saviour (v.12), - nothing went to waste ... and how many baskets were there? ...

Twelve ...enough for each disciple ... each of them had their own basket to bring to the Saviour! Every one of them had a personal purpose and an individual responsibility in His will. ... Does it not speak to you of the personal role He has for you and me to play in Pathhead Baptist Church? Does it not remind you we all have a responsibility for which He will one day call us to account?

CONCLUSION

Yes, it is all about God, - His **Providence** ... His **Purpose** ... His **Provision** and His **Power** ...

And there is just one final simple thought. In the Song of Solomon we read about the banqueting table (1:12). In II Sam. 9:13 we read about Mephibosheth sitting at the table of King David. ... We read about many great feasts in the Word of God, including the final feast of all, - the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9) ... and included amongst them is the Bible's record of this feast that began with a young boy handing over to Jesus five barley loaves and two small fishes. Yes, "Little is much when *God* is in it!"

One of the older men who did not think his church could 'run without him' was trying to impress the young man who was there for the first time, "I have been a member of this church now for over forty years. I am a father in Israel." Innocently, the young man asked him, "How many children have you? How many have you brought to Christ?" "Well," the man said, "I do not know that I ever brought anybody to Christ." The young fellow was not for giving up, "You call yourself a father in Israel, and yet you have no children!"

... Don't you see the point? Where are the loaves and the fish? Are they stored away somewhere ... spiritually 'blue-moulding'? ... In the Old Testament wilderness, any manna the Israelites tried to store away for any longer than they were told became of no use. The manna had to be fresh ... and the loaves and the fish this young boy brought to Jesus were fresh, and ready to be used in the work of the Lord.

In this New Year, may God find us bringing to Him nothing but our very best, - and we'll look after those individual baskets He has given us, - so that we would privilege us with the joy of experiencing the work of many miracles of grace, ... even here amongst His own precious and beloved people! Amen.