Loaves – Disciples – Multitudes

For the past year our TV screens have brought us many scenes of refugees fleeing from conflict in Syria and elsewhere in the Muslim World and seeking refuge in the northern parts of Europe. Our hearts have been moved. Our deepest emotions have been stirred. I believe we have heard God speaking to us in His Word concerning His work in Muslim lands. I believe that some have caught a new vision of His will and His plan for their lives. Yet this doesn't automatically mean that more Muslims will hear the Good News.

News and information will not necessarily change us. God always remains the same in His love and longing for a lost world including all Muslims and in His willingness and power to bless and to save. The open question is: what will you or I do?

I don't think there is any truth that is more heart-searching and more inspiring than the truth that God has made us humans 'necessary' to Himself. Isn't that an astonishing statement! I don't mean that we are **inherently** necessary to God in the same way that He is to us. God need not have made us believers necessary but, in fact, He has chosen to use us human beings to carry out His will. ***"You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit."*** (Jn. 15:16)

The Lord Jesus is the vine and He has made us the branches upon which His fruit must be borne. The Lord Jesus, the great 'head', has made us the members of His body through whom alone His will can be carried out. The Lord Jesus has chosen to make Himself dependent upon you and me for the carrying out of His great purpose of reaching everyone with the Good News of the Gospel.

I want to give you one among many Biblical illustrations of this amazing fact. It is in the account of the Lord Jesus feeding the five thousand. (Mt. 14:13-21; Mk. 6:32-44; Lk. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1-13) We describe this incident as a miracle and so it was. But it is more than a miracle! It is also a parable about missions!

Clearly the Lord Jesus broke the physical bread near the Lake of Galilee to satisfy the hunger of the crowd, but more than that, He must also have seen earth's billions of starving people – starving for the Bread of Life. He did this miracle not just with the object of appeasing the hunger of those Galileans, but also with the larger purpose in mind of revealing to His disciples His great, abiding principle of feeding the earth's billions with the Bread of Life. In other words, I believe this incident was designed to be a parable of reaching the whole world with the Gospel.

I want you to see the picture of the Lord Jesus with His disciples around Him facing the hungry multitude. We read that, ***"As He lifted up His eyes and saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion."*** He saw them as sheep without a shepherd, as sick ones needing healing, as hungry folk needing to be fed and His great heart went out towards them in love and longing.

Please note that He made no move to feed them by Himself. He would only move in association with His disciples. He wanted to bring His disciples into partnership with Himself. We read, ***"He said to Philip, 'Where can we buy bread that these may all eat?' And this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do."***

Poor Philip seems to have completely forgotten the fact that by his side stood the omnipotent Son of God, the Lord of Life and Power. Leaving the Lord Jesus out of the calculation, he worked out how to feed the crowd based purely on human reasoning. He did his calculations and made a remarkable discovery that, ***"Eight month's wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have one bite."*** (Jn. 6:7) We are not told how much would be enough to feed everyone a good meal. "A bite" would be just enough to tantalise their appetite and make bad matters worse! I think the Lord Jesus was disappointed that Philip had missed the way!

We can thank God that those He called to set up our 'movement' didn't begin by making budgets and raising start-up funding similar to poor Philip when they first went down to Mexico! They didn't think at all in terms of human resources, but rather in terms of God's character and His promises

and His infinite resources. They took God into account and reckoned Him as their greatest asset in bringing our movement into being.

Then a little lad came on the scene and saved the situation. He offered his small lunch to the Lord Jesus who took the loaves without the slightest disparagement of the little gift. It is true that Andrew almost spoiled things by saying, ***"What are these among so many?"*** But the Lord Jesus immediately said, ***"Make the people sit down".*** In effect, he said, "This is what I have been waiting for; now let us get down to business." And so the Lord Jesus and the little lad fed the huge crowd!

Could the Lord Jesus have done it without the young boy? We don't know, but the Lord Jesus didn't do it without the lad. This is a fact and needs no speculation. We know that the power was that of the Lord Jesus, but it is equally true that the loaves and the fish belonged to the lad. The Lord Jesus waited for the little lad to act first and then, through His almighty power, He made the offered gift the means of feeding the hungry crowds.

The Lord Jesus is still seeking the counterpart of that little lad to help him in carrying the Gospel to all nations and all peoples. He sometimes chooses people like Henry Martyn and the Cambridge Seven, but He doesn't need great and famous people, for He Himself has infinite power. He says,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go … and surely I (the Omnipotent One) ***am with you always, to the very end of the age."*** (Mt. 28:18-19)

That is **all** that is necessary.

In Person – by Prayer – by Purse

We praise God for all those who have followed in the train of our leaders who went to Mexico in the late 50s. We praise Him for all the men and women who have gone to Muslim lands following our first workers in the early 60s. We all went very conscious of our weakness and insufficiency but what we had to offer was placed into the hands of the Lord Jesus. It was multiplied and used to reach country after country of these largely ignored Muslim people groups. So many millions received the Good News of Salvation because of these "little lads" bringing their meagre "loaves and fishes" and putting them at the disposal of the Lord Jesus. We rejoice that tens of thousands from the Muslim World will be in that great throng of redeemed ones around the throne of the Lord Jesus in heaven. We will hear them sing His praises in languages we have struggled to learn!

Again we thank God for all those who could not go in person but who have gone **in prayer** – for those who have laid hold on that mighty power God has provided to us His children by which we are able to, "**Move the arm that holds the world and bring salvation down**" [See poem at the end]

Prayer has been the strongest emphasis in our movement. We were born in prayer in the 50s and we have been maintained by prayer ever since. If that great volume of prayer ever ceased we would immediately collapse! How we thank God for the thousands who have laboured fervently in prayer for the Muslim World and for us as individuals.

Yet again, we thank God for those who have gone to the Muslim World **by purse** – who have caught a new vision of stewardship and been led to put a new value on money, not as something that ministers to self-indulgence and self-gratification, but as something with which we may help the Lord Jesus carry out His great worldwide plan of building His church. How we thank God for the men and women who have learned to think of silver and gold not in terms of large houses, luxuries and comforts, but in terms of workers sent out, new areas reached and many come to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour. They have used their money for the extension of the rule of the Lord Jesus and to hasten His coming. Has this been a big sacrifice for them? No, not at all! It has been a splendid investment. The men and women involved in the financial side of reaching Muslim peoples have received immeasurably more than they have put in. Their lives have been immeasurably enlarged and enriched.

Some of those who have worked among Muslims have faced hardship, danger and deprivation of many kinds. Those who are now back in their home countries will assure you that theirs is the

happiest lot and the grandest investment in the world. There is no other joy or satisfaction like that of helping the Lord Jesus to feed hungry people with the Bread of Eternal Life.

But there are still multitudes of Muslims that have not been reached. There yet remain hundreds of millions who have never heard of the Only Saviour. The Lord Jesus sees the millions and His heart is still moved with compassion towards them. He longs to feed them – to save them, but He won't do it alone. At Calvary He paid the full price of their redemption, but He has committed to His disciples the task of carrying this glorious news to them. So He has made you and me necessary to Himself! The great 'head' must have the response and co-operation of the members of His 'body'. He needs us and He depends on us to help Him!

Please note in this passage three words: **loaves** – **disciples – multitude**s and note the inspired order of these words. Where are the disciples? They are between the loaves and the multitudes. How are the loaves going to get to the multitudes? Not directly from the hands of the Lord Jesus, but through the disciples.

The Lord Jesus came to earth accepting responsibility for the redemption of a world of sinners. He went all the way to Calvary for their sin and cried out on the Cross, ***"It is finished"***. Then He rose triumphant from the grave and before returning to heaven He laid on His disciples the responsibility of carrying the message of redemption to the whole world.

This is a responsibility that still rests on us. We are His disciples and He has placed in our hands the Bread of Life for men, women and children who are starving and dying for lack of it. The only way the Bread of Life can get from the Lord Jesus to them is through us. What a terrific responsibility! We stand between the Lord Jesus – the Bread of Life – the only hope of salvation – and the more than 2 billion Muslims. We are standing in one of two ways – either as **obstructionists** keeping the Bread of Life from them by our selfish indifference and sloth or as **helpers** of the Lord Jesus passing on the news of salvation to those who so desperately need it by going, by praying or by giving as the Lord Jesus directs. He is the one who determines the part each of us should play in the overall task.

So remember, **loaves – disciples – multitudes**. May we be challenged again to fulfil our role as disciples for the sake of those who are so desperately needy and for the sake of the Lord Jesus who is so absolutely worthy.

Prayer Moves the Hand That Moves the World
by *John A. Wallace*

There is an eye that never sleeps
Beneath the wing of the night;
There is an ear that never shuts
When sink the beams of light.

There is an arm that never tires
When human strength gives way;
There is a love that never fails
When earthly loves decay.

That eye is fixed on seraph throngs;
That arm upholds the sky;
That ear is filled with angel songs;
That love is throned on high.

But there's a power that man can wield,
When mortal aid is vain,
That eye, that arm, that love to reach,
That listening ear to gain.

That power is prayer, which soars on high,
Through Jesus, to the throne,
And moves the hand which moves the world,
To bring salvation down.