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POWER THAT MOVES HEAVEN.

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“ And when He had sent the multitude away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray ; and when the evening was come, He was there alone.” —Matt. xiv. 23.

THE fame of Jesus had gone all through the land ; the common people had taken up the praises of His great and wondrous works. They had seen the majesty of His power in healing the sick and raising the dead, and the story of his marvellous works had gone not only among the poor people ; not only among those who walked the streets, but from hovel to palace, till the king upon his throne himself had heard the wondrous work of our

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Saviour, and had begun to question who this man was.

His own guilty conscience troubled him, for just before, he had caused John to be beheaded, and as a guilty conscience always brings, not rest, but unrest, so Herod began to wonder if this were not John walking in the streets again, going from house to house, doing marvellous works. Jesus he did not know much about, but John he had ordered to be cast into prison. But it was not John; it was the Lord Jesus Himself that John had promised should come, whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose.

Our Lord Jesus became weary, for He was a man like other men in form. You remember He sat by the wayside to rest Himself by the well, as the woman of Samaria came to draw water. He had made a long, weary march through the hot sands of the desert, having gone many miles out of His way with that single purpose of saving one lost soul. And when the

woman came to Him, He opened the well of salvation, and the woman herself became the first missionary of the cross, going back to the village to tell her friends that she had found the Messiah, the One who should be the Saviour of the world.

Our Lord Jesus, with all the events of these days, had become weary in body, and He knew, for He knew everything, that His disciples, too, were weary with the day's march. He said to His disciples, "Let us go apart for a while in the desert place and rest." O, how much there is in that one little, simple word, Rest. There is an invitation that has been ringing through the ages ever since it was spoken, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." or, as the revised version has it, "I will rest you."

There is only one power that can give rest to a weary soul, and that one Power and Person is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There are burdened

and weary hearts everywhere, hearts longing to know what rest is, of soul as well as of body. There is but one place, and that is at the foot of the cross; but one way, to look up into His lovely face, and hear Him say as He said of old, "Come, and I will give you rest." And no weary soul ever bowed at His feet but found rest, rest of soul as well as of body, rest from the weariness of strife, the burden of sin, and from all the cares and perplexities of this life

He who knew the hearts of all men said to His disciples, "Let us go apart and rest" The multitude followed them to the desert place, mile after mile, till they came to the stopping place, not far from the sea, the great lake of Galilee. Where the Lord called to the multitude and to the disciples to halt, and stretched out His hand again to heal the sick that were thronging Him, His heart so full of compassion and love He could not

then stop to rest. As it came to the close of day, the sun casting its rays lower and lower down over the hillside, the disciples said to the Lord, "Let us send the multitudes away; they have been with us all the day long without eating; let us send them to the villages and homes that they may get something to eat." The Lord turned to the disciples and said, "They need not depart; give ye them to eat."

The disciples were astonished, for they thought the Lord must have known how little they had to give. "Why, Lord and Master, we have only five loaves and two fishes, and what are they among such a multitude? Here are five thousand men, besides women and children; we had better send them over to the village and let them buy for themselves." "No," He said, "bring the loaves and the fishes to me." That is all. Why, I am sure you will take the lesson; it is all right in your heart before I

speak it, that, no matter how little our possession, He says, "Bring it to me."

It was all the disciples had, and they might have replied, "This does not amount to anything at all." Hearts say it to-day, and have said it all through the ages, since this utterance. "What is the use of giving the little I can give when the need is so great everywhere? My fifty cents or five dollars is so small it is no use to bring it." And some one else says, "I will not speak; it is no use for me to say anything, I should make bungling work. Let some one who has a silver tongue and powers of utterance speak; I cannot." Another one says, "I can do so little, it is hardly of use for me to occupy a seat in the sanctuary; let those come who can receive a richer blessing than I can get. My talent is so small I had better put it in a napkin and hide it there; it is too small to bring to Thee."

O, beloved, there is no effort too

small to bring to Jesus, no offering however little but is accepted of Him. The utterance rings out from the day He uttered it until now; not even a cup of cold water given in His name shall lose its reward. But the gift must be one of sacrifice, one that costs you something; an out and out sacrifice is acceptable to God, and only that. And so He said to the disciples, "It matters not how little you have, bring it hither to me." The disciples had carried five loaves and two fishes for their own need, that the Lord Himself might have nourishment; so they might have said, "Can we give these things up? Shall we not suffer if we give our bread to this multitude of people who care nothing for us, and scarcely for the Saviour Himself, only that their bodies may be healed, and that they may see His marvellous power, and talk about it as one of the wonders of the century?"

This multiplying of the loaves and fishes is not brought down to us sim-

ply as a matter of history; no, the story has gone throughout the world in language after language, and comes down to us this morning to tell of the wondrous power of the Lord Jesus Christ, His love and compassion for fallen humanity, the love that was willing to give not only of the loaves and fishes, and multiply them, but to give His own Body on the tree, for your sins and my sins. As the sun breaks through the clouds this morning, so the Sun of Righteousness comes in waves of power into our hearts and tells us that Jesus lives, as wondrously and mightily lives as when He multiplied the loaves and fishes. We know that we are to bring our everything, no matter how small, to leave it in His hands, and see Him multiply it from shore to shore, from clime to clime, from height to height, till it touches the very throne of God.

We can see Him standing among that vast multitude of people, the loaves and fishes laid upon a rock.

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The disciples had given up all they had in the world, *their* "loaves and fishes"; they had taken their hands from them, had given them to Jesus, — they were not theirs any longer. We can see the disciples moving at the command of Jesus, and placing the people on the right hand and on the left hand in rows, telling them just how to sit. They knew not what was to be done, but Jesus had commanded that the people should sit down upon the grass, and there they sat, looking and wondering as to what was to be accomplished now, what the Master was to do with that multitude of people. Many who followed Him had been sick and lame and blind; now they walked with ease; for the first time their eyes were opened to see all the beauties of nature, the lake spread out before them, the sunny beach and broad expanse of clear water at their feet, and the blue sky above them.

Standing on a little elevation just

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beyond them was the One who had touched their eyes and given them sight. They must have looked upon Him as the One altogether lovely and full of glory, who had given sight to their eyes and power to see all the beauties that now revealed themselves. There is a little incident of a man who all his life had been blind, and everywhere he went — for he was a man of wealth and went to oculist after oculist — was told there was no hope for him. Finally, hearing of one famous oculist whom he had not visited, he consulted him, and the doctor said to him: "I think, with God's blessing, I can restore your eyes."

For weeks he was shut up in a dark room, but finally one day the doctor said:

"You may open the shutters, and let him look out."

They opened the shutters and said: "Look out and see the beautiful trees and flowers and blue sky above." But he said:

"Where is the man who gave me my sight? I care nothing about the blue sky and lovely flowers; I want to see the man."

The doctor, who had stood back, stepped forward, and the man, leaping to his feet, ran to him, threw his arms around his neck, and embraced him, saying, "I want to see the man who has given me my sight."

O, if that was so, if a heart could be so stirred by the mighty and wondrous work of a man's fingers, what must the thought of exultation be to one who could look at the Lord Jesus Christ, who had simply *touched* his eyes and given him sight!

What a sight this must have been, as the disciples and the multitudes were waiting to hear that voice, watching to see what He would do! As He looks up into the blue above and calls upon God for His blessing to rest upon the people, and the breaking of that bread, and the scattering of the bread and fishes among them, wo

can almost hear the sound of that musical voice, sounding as if it came from heaven itself, wafting its silver tones into the ears and hearts of the people as they sit upon the grass, hardly hearing what He says, but realizing that it is His prayer that God's power may be manifest. Then He gives the broken bread and the fishes to His disciples, and they give them to the multitude to eat. You know the story, how, after they have all been fed, and fed so bountifully that they could eat no more, He said to the disciples, "Now take your baskets and gather up what is left." And each disciple went about down through the rows of people, from hill to hill, and gathered up "twelve baskets full."

The application is easy. The disciples gave what they had to the Lord Jesus Christ. In His hands, their little was made an abundance — enough to feed the thousands. People everywhere try to put their money in the best and safest places for investment,

and to have it yield them eight, ten, or twenty per cent., yet there is an investment they have forgotten that promises a hundred-fold in this life and in the world to come life everlasting. This morning's lesson proves it to us; the disciples had for their own eating more than they had in the beginning, and thousands of people were fed.

Now we come to the words of our text: "When He had sent the multitudes away." Why did He send them away? The people had known Him to heal sick bodies, make the lame to walk, and unstop deaf ears. They had seen before their own eyes that He took five loaves and two fishes and multiplied them so greatly that He had fed thousands upon thousands of people, and they began to cry out that He must be the promised king, and were ready to take Him by force and make Him king. But He said, "No, my kingdom is not of this world," and by one utterance He sends

this vast multitude to their homes. Why, we can see Him standing there as He said, "Go to your homes; tell what great things have been done unto you, if you will, and that the Gospel has been preached to the poor." They must have looked back and lingered long to keep a glimpse of that wondrous form, as the halo and glory of the upper kingdom encircled His head.

It was almost evening when He fed this multitude of people, for the disciples had said, "They have been with us all the day, and must be hungry as we are." And now He constrains His disciples to get into a boat to go over to the other side; the multitude is dispersed, the sun gone down in all its beauty, and Jesus goes alone up the side of that hill, and for what purpose? Simply to pray. Is it sometimes hard for us, after a long and weary day, to have the heart to pray?

It is a blessed thing for us and for the children of God everywhere to

meet in His house and lift up the voice of prayer, but there is no scene like that where, alone with Him, God permits you to bow, and lift up your heart in praise and thanksgiving. Only a Sabbath or two ago we saw Elijah go alone up the mountain to pray God to send rain upon the earth. You remember where he prayed, and the servant went to see if there were any signs of rain, for there had been no rain upon the earth for four years. He sent him again and again, seven times, and then he reported a cloud no bigger than a man's hand in the sky. But Elijah said, "I hear the sound of an abundance of rain."

A greater than Elijah,—for he was simply a prophet to tell that our Lord Jesus Christ was to come,—a greater than Elijah goes up the mountain, simply to pray. We can see Him under the olive trees, with His face toward heaven, His hands uplifted, praying alone. The Word tells us not what He prayed; we presume that

He prayed for Himself at the close of this weary day, with the thought of His own persecution and crucifixion and all that He was to suffer at the hands of men; prayed to the living God that He would keep and sustain Him, and carry Him safely through this scene, that He might finish the work for which He came. Meantime, as the disciples were half way across the lake, a hurricane swept down the mountain-side. They rose and sank, now in the trough of the sea, and again riding upon the waves, till the disciples thought they were lost. But the Lord Jesus, praying in the mountain, heard the sound of the storm, and went down the mountain-side, and, before He reached them, sent His own power that constrained and kept the ship amidst all its dangers, so that it should not be destroyed. They were as safe in that boat as if the Lord Jesus were with them, for His power was there; He had not forgotten those that He loved.

The waves of troubles come around us, encircle our very beings, till we almost wonder if God has not forgotten us; but He has not. He never forsakes those for whom He died, and whom He has promised to keep safely. The stormy waves may toss themselves about us never so fiercely, but the power is there to save and keep His own. Our Lord reached the shore, and put His foot upon the water; step after step He walks upon that sea; the waves become as solid granite under His feet. The disciples saw some one walking upon the water, and were afraid. Could this be the Lord Jesus coming toward them? Here they were in this boat, with every prospect of going to the bottom, and somebody walking toward them on the water. Although He comes in the storm, He comes in peace.

Oh, beloved, our Lord Jesus is with us as much in the storm as in the sunshine. Our Lord Jesus is with us amid the blooming of flowers. He is

with us in the hurricane, as it sweeps down the mountain-side. With us in the storm and in the sunshine, in the sorrow and in the blessing, if we will only keep Him. I am sure the blessing must come home to your own hearts with all its loveliness, for it is one of the sweetest lessons that our Lord has taught us out of His life history, that He cares for His own. He knew that trials would surround His children everywhere, but He says, "Be not afraid; I gave my life for you, I give it still. The storm may come in all its power; the hurricane may sweep around you; the waves may look as if they would swallow you; but be not afraid, it is I."

I am sure as I close I can bring no sweeter lesson to your hearts than the one of our text. When He had sent away the multitude, at the close of a weary day, He went up into the mountain to pray. Is it your habit? There can be no success in Christian life, no power in your life except through

prayer. The Lord can be to you only what you take Him for. If you take Him to be your guide, you must talk with Him and look to Him. If you take Him to be your counsellor, you must counsel with Him. Your burden bearer, you must give Him your burdens. Your helper, you must spread before Him your difficulties. Our Lord Jesus went up to the mountain to pray; He gained strength; He gained power; He was filled.

Beloved, the everlasting hills stand forth in all their grandeur still; just as sweet to the child of God to-day, to mount and see Him who gave Himself for us. Trials may sweep around us, but Jesus comes with them; not an absent Lord, but one who reigns upon earth, and in the hearts of those who love Him. I want to urge upon you then, not only the need, but the blessed privilege of prayer. It is the power that moves heaven, that brings peace and joy into the heart. It is the power that has come down from the very

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throne of heaven, and sweeping through the hearts of men, has lifted them up to the heights of communion. It is the power over temptation, the power that will enable one to walk with God, and by and by to reign with Him upon His throne, and to praise Him forever and ever.

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