

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE GREAT POT AND THE TWENTY LOAVES.

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## A Sermon

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“Set on the great pot.”—2 Kings iv. 38.

“Then bring meal.”—2 Kings iv. 41.

“Give unto the people that they may eat.”—2 Kings iv. 42.

WE scarcely need go over the story. There was a dearth in the land; Elisha came to the college of the prophets, which consisted of about a hundred brethren, and found that they were in want, as the result of the famine. While he was teaching the young men, he observed that they looked as if they needed food, and he found that there was none in the house. Elisha, therefore, ordered his servant to take the great pot, which generally stood upon long legs over the fire, and make a nourishing soup in it. True, there was nothing to put in the pot, but he believed that God would provide. It was for him to set the pot over the fire, and it was for the Lord to fill it. Some of the young men were not so sure as Elisha was that God could fill it without their help, and one with great eagerness went out to gather something from the fields; his help turned out to be of small service, for he brought home poisonous cucumbers, and cut them up, and threw them into the broth; and, lo, when they began to pour it out, it was acrid to the taste, gave them a terrible colic, and made them cry out, “There is death in the pot.”

Then the prophet said, “Bring meal.” This was put into the steaming caldron, the poison was neutralized, the food was made wholesome, and the students were satisfied. This miracle was in due time followed up by another. A day or two afterwards, the young prophets were still needing food, and the larder was again empty. Just at that time, a devout man comes from a little distance, bringing a present for the prophet, which consisted of a score of loaves similar to our penny rolls. The prophet bids his

servitor set this slender quantity before the college. He is astonished at the command to feed a hundred hungry men with so little, but he is obedient to it; and while he is obeying, the little food is multiplied, so that the hundred men eat and are perfectly satisfied, and there is something left.

I believe there are lessons to be learned from these two miracles, and I shall try to bring out these lessons in three forms. First, as they shall relate to *the present condition of religion in our land*; secondly, as they may be made to relate to *the condition of backsliders*; and, thirdly, as they may afford comfortable direction to *seeking sinners*.

I. First, then, our text, as in a parable, sets forth in a figure our course of action in connection with RELIGION IN THIS LAND.

And, first, there is a great need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have not a hundred men famishing nowadays, but hundreds of thousands, and even hundreds of millions in this great world who are perishing for want of heavenly food. *The Church must feed the people*. It is not for us to say, "We hope they will be saved," and leave it there; or set it down as a work that cannot be done till the millennium, and therefore we have nothing to do with it. Our business is, in the strength of God, to grapple with the present condition of things. Here are the millions famishing; shall we let them famish? I remember seeing similar sentences under the likeness of the late Richard Knill;—"The heathen are perishing! Shall we let them perish?" "But," says one, "how can we possibly supply them with food?" See what Elisha did; the people were hungry, and there was no food in hand, except a little meal, yet he said, "Set on the great pot." Faith always does as much as she can; if she cannot fill the pot, she can put it on the fire, at any rate. If she cannot find meat for the pottage, she pours in the water, lights the fire, and prays and waits. Some have not this faith nowadays; and until we have it, we cannot expect the blessing. Thus saith the Lord, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitation." Why? Because "thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left." Few will regard such a summons as this. The feeble faith of our time finds it difficult to enlarge the tent even after the increase has come, and the people are there to fill it. Great faith would enlarge the tent, and expect the Lord to keep his promise, and multiply us with men as with a flock. The Church of God greatly needs, not foolish confidence in herself, which would lead her to be Quixotic, but simple confidence in God, which would enable her to be apostolic, for she would go forth believing that God would be with her, and great things would be accomplished by her. She would open her mouth wide, expecting that God would fill it, and fill it he would. Faith does what she can, and waits for her Lord to do what *he* can. Brother, what is your faith doing? Are you putting the great pot on the fire in expectation of a blessing?

"Set on the great pot," said the prophet, "*and see the pottage.*" He was not in jest, he meant what he said. Often, when we get

as far as setting on the pot, it is not for seething pottage. We feel the desire to carry out spiritual work, but we do not come to practical action as those who work for immediate results. Oh, for practical common sense in connection with Christianity! Oh, for reality in connection with the idea of faith! When a man goes to his business to make money, he goes there with all his wits about him; but, frequently, when men come to prayer and Christian service, they leave their minds behind, and do not act as if they were transacting real business with God. Elisha, when he said, "Set on the great pot," expected God to fill it; he was sure it would be so, and he waited in all patience till dinner was ready. O Church of God, set on the pot, and the great pot, too! Say, "The Lord will bless us." Get your granary cleaned out, that the Lord may fill it with his good corn. Put the grist into the hopper, and look for the wind to turn the sails of the mill. O ye doubters, throw up the windows, that the fresh breeze of the Divine Spirit may blow in on your sickly faces! Expect that God is about to send the manna, and have your omers ready. We shall see greater things than these if we awake to our duty and our privilege. It is the Church's business to feed the world with spiritual bread; she can only do so by faith, and she ought to act in faith in reference to it.

The faith of Elisha was not shared by all the brethren. There were some who must needs go and fill the pot, as we have said, but they gathered the gourds of the colocynth vine, and poisoned the whole mess, and it became needful to find an antidote for the poison. We here see our second duty, *the Church must provide an antidote for the heresies and poisonous doctrines of the time.* There has entered into the public ministry of this country a deadly poison. We may say of the Church in general, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!" Zealous persons, whose zeal for God is not according to knowledge, have gone about and gathered the gourds of the wild vine. I think I could tell you what kind of gourds they are; some of them are very pretty to look at, and they grow best on the seven hills of Rome, they are called "Ritualistic performances"; these they shred into the pot. There are gourds of another kind, very delicate and dainty in appearance, which are known as "liberal views" or "modern thought." As a philosopher once talked of extracting sunbeams from cucumbers, so these wild gourds are said to consist of "sweetness and light", but the light is darkness and the sweetness is deadly. They have shred these into the pot, and nobody can taste the doctrinal mixture which is served out from some pulpits without serious risk of soul-poisoning, for "there is death in the pot." What Scriptural doctrine is there which men do not deny and yet call themselves Christians? What truth is there which our fathers held which is endorsed by those who think themselves the leaders of advanced thought? Have they not polluted the entire sanctuary of truth, and lifted up their axes against all the carved work of the temple? On the other hand, have we not, almost everywhere, Christ put aside for the crucifix, and the blessed Spirit thrust into a corner by the so-called sacraments? Is not the outward made to drown

the inward, and is not the precious truth of the gospel overlaid by the falsehoods of Rome?

There is death in the pot; how is the Church to meet it? I believe it is to imitate Elisha. We need not attempt to get the wild gourds out of the pot, they are cut too small, and are too cunningly mixed up; they have entered too closely into the whole mass of teaching to be removed. Who shall extract the leaven from the leavened loaf? What then? We must look to God for help, and use the means indicated here. "*Bring meal.*" Good wholesome food was cast into the poisonous stuff, and by God's gracious working it killed the poison; and the Church must cast the blessed gospel of the grace of God into the poisoned pottage, and false doctrine will not be able to destroy men's souls as it now does. We shall not do much good by disputing, and denouncing, and refusing to associate with people. I call such things *barking*, but preaching the gospel is *biting*. The surest remedy for false doctrine is preaching the truth. Christianity is the cure for Popery. Preach up Christ, and down go the priests; preach grace, and there is an end of masses. I am more and more persuaded that the good old Calvinistic truths, which are now kept in the background, are the great Krupp guns with which we shall blow to pieces the heresies of the day, if once more they are plainly and persistently preached in harmony with the rest of revealed truth.

Is the remedy very simple? Do not, therefore, despise it. God be thanked that it is simple; for then we shall not be tempted to give the glory to man's wit and wisdom when the good result is achieved. In this work, you can all help; for if only meal is needed, a child may bring his little handful. One man may contribute more than another, but the humblest may put in his pinch of meal, and even the commonest servitor in the house may assist in this work. Spread the gospel. Spread the gospel. Spread the gospel. A Society for prosecuting Puseyites, will that do the work? Appeals to Parliament, will they be effectual? Let those who choose to do so cry to lawyers and Parliaments; but as for us, we will preach the gospel. If I could speak with a voice of thunder, I would say to those friends who are for adopting other means to stop the spread of error, "You waste your time and strength; give all your efforts to the preaching of the gospel. Lift up Christ, and lay the sinner low. Proclaim justification by faith, the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, and the grand old doctrines of the Reformation, and your work will be done; but by no other means." "*Bring meal,*" said the prophet; and our word at this time is, "*Preach the truth as it is in Jesus.*"

Some of the grossest errors of our own day may yet be overruled by God for the promotion of his truth. There are men who believe in sacramentarianism, who love the Lord Jesus very ardently. When I read some of the poetry of this school, I cannot but rejoice to see that the writers love my Lord and Master, and it strikes me that, if the whole gospel could be put before them, we might expect to see some of them become noble preachers of the truth, and perhaps save the orthodox from dead dry doctrinalism

by reviving a more direct devotion to the Saviour. Perhaps they will not, with us, talk often of justification by faith, but if they extol the merit of the precious blood and wounds of Jesus, it will come to much the same thing. For my part, I care little for the phraseology, if essential truth be really taught, and the Lord Jesus be exalted.

Some of the doubters, too, "thinkers", as they prefer to be called, if the Lord renewed them by his Spirit, might bring out the old truths with greater freshness than our more conservative minds are able to do. I love to hear those who have known the vanity of error speak out the truth. They are more sympathetic towards the tempted, and are generally more conversant with the grounds of our faith.

Who knows? Who knows? I have a hope which may not prove a dream. I hope that thousands are feeling their way into light, and will come forth soon. Let us not despair, but keep to our work, which is gospel preaching, telling about Jesus and his dear love, the power of his blood, the prevalence of his plea, and the glory of his throne, and who knows but that a multitude of the priests may believe, and the philosophers also may become babes in Christ's school? "Bring meal," and thus meet the poison with the antidote.

Another lesson comes from the second miracle; let us look at it. The loaves brought to Elisha were not quartern loaves like ours, but either mere wafers of meal which had been laid flat on a hot stone, and so baked, or else small rolls of bread. The store was but little, yet Elisha said, "Feed the people," and they were fed. That is the third lesson, *the Church is to use all she has, and trust in God to multiply her strength*. Nowadays, individuals are apt to think they may leave matters to Societies, but this is highly injurious; we should every one go forth to work for God, and use our own talents, be they few or many. Societies are not meant to enable us to shirk our personal duty, under the idea that our strength is small. Little churches are apt to think that they cannot do much, and therefore they do not expect a great blessing. What can these few cakes do towards feeding a hundred men? They forget that God can multiply them. Ye limit the Holy One of Israel. Do you think he needs our numbers? Do you think he is dependent upon human strength? I tell you, our weakness is a better weapon for God than our strength. The Church in the apostolic times was poor, and mostly made up of unlearned and ignorant men, but she was filled with power. What name that would have been famous in ordinary history do you find among her first members? Yet that humble Church of fishermen and common people shook the world. The church nowadays is for the most part too strong, too wise, too self-dependent, to do much. Oh, that she were more God-reliant! Even those whom you call great preachers will be great evils if you trust to them. This I know, we ought never to complain of weakness, or poverty, or lack of prestige, but should consecrate to God what we have.

"Oh, but I can scarcely read a chapter!" Well, read that

chapter to God's glory. You who cannot say more than half-a-dozen words to others, say that little in the power of the Spirit. If you cannot do more than write a letter to a friend about his soul, or give away a tract to a stranger in the streets, do it in God's name. Brother, sister, do what you can; and in doing this, God will strangely multiply your power to do good, and cause great results to flow from small beginnings. Active faith is needed; and if this be richly present, the Lord in whom we trust will do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, or even think.

II. And now, briefly, but very earnestly, I desire to speak to BACKSLIDERS.

In all our churches, there are members who are no better than they should be. It is very questionable whether they ought to be allowed to be members at all; they have gone very far back from what they used to be, or ought to be. They scarcely ever join the people of God in public prayer, though they once professed to be very devout. Private prayer is neglected, and family prayer given up. Is it not so with some to whom I address myself? Have you not lost the light of God's countenance, and gone far away from happy communion with Christ? It is not for me to charge you; let your own consciences speak. I hope that you are now beginning to feel an inward hunger, and to perceive that your backslidings have brought famine upon you. What shall I bid you do? Go and attempt your own restoration by the works of the law? By no means: I bid you *bring your emptiness to Christ, and look for his fulness*. Yours is a great empty pot; set it on the fire, and cry to God to fill it. Jesus says to lukewarm Laodicea, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him." "Alas!" says the Laodicean, "I have nothing in the house." Your confession is true; but when our Lord comes to sup, he brings his supper with him. He stands at the door of every backslider, and knocks. Will you let him in? "Oh!" say you, "I wish he would enter." Dear brother, open your heart now, just as you did at the first, when as a poor sinner you went to him. Say unto him, "Blessed Lord, there is nothing in me but emptiness, but here is the guest-chamber. Come in all thy love, and sup with me, and let me sup with thee. I am nothing, come and be my All-in-all." "But," says the backslider, "may I really come to Jesus, just as I did at the first?" Listen. "Return, ye backsliding children, for I am married unto you, saith the Lord." He is married unto you; and though you have behaved badly, the marriage bond is not broken. Where is the bill of divorcement which he hath sued out? Is it not written, "he hateth putting away"? Come just as you are, and begin anew, for he will accept you again.

"But," say you, "alas for me, I have been gathering wild gourds!" What have you been doing, professor? You have left undone what you ought to have done, and you have done many things you ought not to have done, and therefore there is no health in you. You have been trying to find pleasure in the world, and you have found wild vines. You have been tempted by love of

music, love of mirth, love of show, and you have gathered wild gourds, a lap full, almost a heart full. You have been shredding death into the pot, and now you cannot feel as you used to feel, the poison is stupefying your soul. While we were singing just now, you said, "I want to sing as saints do, but there is no praise in me." When you meet with a man who is mighty in prayer, you say, "Alas, I used to pray like that, but my power is gone;" the poison is paralyzing you. If you are a worldling, and not God's child, you can live on that which would poison a Christian; but if you are a child of God, you will cry out, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!" Some of you have become rich, and have fallen into worldly fashionable habits; these are the colocynth cucumbers. Others of you are poor, and necessarily work with ungodly men, and perhaps their example has lowered the tone of your spirit, and led you into their ways. If you love this condition, I grieve for you; but if you loathe it, I trust you are a child of God, notwithstanding your state.

What are you to do who have in any way fallen? Why, *receive afresh the soul-saving gospel*. "Bring meal,"—simple, nourishing, gospel truth, and cast it into the poisoned pottage. Begin anew with Jesus Christ, as you did at first; say to him, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "Repent, and do thy first works." Do you not recollect the period when first your eyes lighted on his cross, and you stood there burdened and heavy-laden, fearing that you would sink to hell, until you read in his dear wounds that your sin was put away? There you found peace as you saw your transgressions laid on Jesus, and removed from you. Oh, how you loved him! Come, brother, let us go to-night again to the cross, and begin to love him again. That will cure you of the world's poisonous influences, and bring back the old feelings, the old joys, the old loves, and take the death out of the pot. Backslider, you need now exactly what you needed at first, namely, faith in Jesus. Come repenting, come believing, to the Saviour, and he will remove the ills which the gourds of earth's wild vines have brought upon you.

"Ah!" say some of you, "we can understand how the Lord Jesus can fill our emptiness, and heal our soul's sicknesses, but how shall we continue in the right way? Our past experience has taught us our weakness, we are afraid that even the great pot will only last us for a little while, and then our souls will famish." Then remember the other part of our text, in which we read that, when the few loaves, and the ears of corn in the husks, were brought to Elisha, the Lord multiplied them. Though you may have very little grace, that grace shall be increased. "He giveth more grace." We receive grace for grace, daily grace for daily need. Between this and heaven you will want a heaven full of grace, and you will have it. No one knows what draughts you will make upon the sacred exchequer of the King of kings, but his treasury will not be exhausted. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

III. Our third and last word is TO THE SEEKING SINNER.

Many of you, I trust, desire salvation. The subject before us has much comfort in it for you. You are hungering and thirsting after Christ, and have not yet found peace in him. You lament your own emptiness of all that is good. Then, poor soul, do just what the prophet bade his servant do, "set on the great pot," that is, confess your emptiness unto the Lord. Tell the Lord what a sinner you are. I know not whether the story be true of Mr. Rowland Hill's leading the landlord of an inn to pray. Mr. Hill would have family prayer wherever he stayed; and if this was refused, he would order out his horses, and go on. On one occasion, he is reported to have asked the landlord to act as priest in his own house, but the man replied, "I can't pray, I never prayed in my life." However, after a while, Mr. Hill had him on his knees, and when the man said, "I cannot pray," Mr. Hill cried out, "Tell the Lord so, and ask him to help you." The man exclaimed, "O God, I can't pray, teach me." "That will do," said Mr. Hill, "you have begun." Whatever your state is to-night, if you desire salvation, go and tell the Lord your condition. Say, "Lord, I have a hard heart; soften it." If you cannot feel, tell him so, and ask him to make you feel. Begin at the root of the matter; set on the great pot, empty as it is. Be honest with the Most High; reveal to him what he so well knows, but what you so little know, the evil of your heart, and your great necessity. If you cannot come *with* a broken heart, come *for* a broken heart. If you cannot come with anything good, the mercy is that nothing good is needed as a preparation for coming to Christ. Come just as you are. Do not wait to fill the pot, but set it on to be filled.

Do I hear you reply, "Ah, you don't know who I am; I have lived many years in sin"? Yes, I know you; you are the young man that found the wild vine, and went and gathered of its gourds a lapful,—a horrible lapful. Some of you rebellious sinners have ruined yourselves, body and soul, and perhaps in estate as well, by your sins. We hear of people sowing their wild oats; that is a bad business. They had better never do it, for the reaping of those wild oats is terrible work. You have poisoned your life, man, with those wild gourds. Can the pottage of your life be made wholesome again? Yes; *you* cannot do it with your own efforts, but "bring meal," and it will be done. If thou believest on the Lord Jesus, he will be the antidote to deadly habits of sin. If thou wilt simply trust in him who bled for thee, the tendency of thy soul to sin shall be overcome, the poison which now boils in thy veins shall be expelled, and thy soul shall escape as a bird out of the snare of the fowler. Thy flesh upon thee, in a spiritual sense, shall become fresher than a little child's. Though thou art full of the poison, till every vein is ready to burst with it, the great Physician will give thee an antidote which shall at once and for ever meet thy case. Wilt thou not try it? Incline thine ear, and come unto him; hear, and thy soul shall live. May God put the meal of the gospel into the pot to-night!

"Ah!" say you, "but if I were now pardoned, how should I hold

on? I have made a hundred promises, and always broken them; I have resolved scores of times, but my resolutions have never come to anything." Ah, poor heart, that is when thou hast the saving of thyself; but when God has the saving of thee, it will be another matter. When we begin to save ourselves, we very soon come to a disastrous shipwreck; but when God, the eternal Lover of the souls of men, puts his hand to salvation-work, and Jesus puts forth the hand once fastened to the cross, there are no failures then.

I have tried to preach a very simple sermon, and to say some earnest things; but it is likely that I may have missed the mark with some, and therefore I will again draw the gospel bow in the name of the Lord Jesus. O Lord, direct the arrow! If God will bring souls to Jesus, I will bless his name throughout eternity. Poor lost souls, do you know the way of salvation, do you know how simple it is? Do you know the love of God to such poor souls as you are, and yet do you refuse to attend to it? Do you know that he does not exact any hard conditions of you, but he points to his Son on the cross, and says, "Look"? Can it be that you will not look? Does Jesus die to save, and do you think it is not worth your while to think about salvation? What is the matter with you? Surely you must be mad. When I look back on my own neglect of Christ till I was fifteen years old, it seems like a delirious dream; and when I think of some of you who are thirty or forty, and yet have never thought about your souls, what can be invented to excuse you? I see some of you with bald heads, or with the snow of wintry age lying upon them, and you have not yet considered the world to come; I would say to you, "Men, are ye mad?" Why, ye are worse than mad; for if ye were insane, ye would be excused. Alas, the madness of sin has responsibility connected with it, and therefore it is the worst of all insanities. I pray you, by the living God, you unsaved ones, turn unto the Saviour to-night. Whether you are saved or lost cannot so much matter to me as it will to you. If I faithfully beseech you to look to Jesus, I shall be clear, even if you reject the warning; but for your own sakes, I beseech you to turn to Jesus. By death, which may be so near to you; by judgment, which is certain to you all; by the terrors of hell, by the thunderbolts of execution, by eternity, and better still, by the sweets of Jesus' love, by the charms of his matchless beauty, by the grace which he is prepared to give, by the heaven whose gates of pearl are glistening before the eye of faith, by the sea of glass unruffled by a single wave of trouble, where you shall stand for ever blest if you believe in Jesus, by the Lord himself, I entreat you, seek him at once, while he may be found. May his Holy Spirit lead you so to do! Amen and Amen.

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## Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

### II. KINGS IV. 1-37.

Verse 1. *Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou*