

A Famine of the Word of God

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Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it (Amos 8:11, 12).

In time of plenty who thinks of famine? But famine sometimes succeeds plenty. It was so in Egypt. There were first seven years of plenty, and then seven years of famine; and all the plenty was forgotten when the famine consumed the land. So is it; sometimes with the ministry of the word of God. At a time when many honored servants of the Lord are actively engaged in ministering Christ to souls, there are few perhaps who consider the possibility of scarcity following the plenty. It may be that the greatest blessing that God gives to souls on earth is a plentiful and seasonable ministry of His precious word which testifies of Christ; and yet some of us can look back and see place after place where this was so, which has now become little more than a state of desolation and almost famine of the Word; so that those who are children of God are barely existing instead of being in holy liberty devoted to the Lord. About this some believers may be ready to say, "If we are deprived of all the Lord's gifts, we still have the Bible." True; and we would add, "Ye need not that any man teach you"; for you have received the Holy Spirit, who can "guide you into all the truth"; and happy are those who thus find daily food for their souls. But there is another side to this. How many are there who read the Bible as a routine, and get nothing for their souls? Why is this? Are we not told that Moses and the prophets were read in the Jewish synagogue every sabbath-day? so that, with the Scriptures in their hands, and read at stated intervals, there was such a famine of the word of God, that they knew not Him of whom the Scriptures which they read spake, but actually fulfilled the same in condemning Him. Again, was not Nicodemus wellinstructed in the facts and letter of Scripture? yet was he not ignorant of the foundation truth that a man "must be born again" either to "see" or to "enter into the kingdom of God"? And is it not in the present day most appalling, with so many Bibles and so many readers, to find so few who declare with divine certainty, founded on God's word, their present possession of eternal life; and fewer still who speak of God's word, because it testifies of Christ, being the daily food of their souls? Is there not at this moment with many, and in many places, "a famine of the Word"? As in the time to which we have referred, those only who in their need had to do with Joseph had bread, so it is now. Christ is our Life-sustainer; and many are faint, and in perplexity and uncertainty, because they do not go

to Him to be nourished by His truth. As in olden time the people came to Joseph, saying, "Give us bread," so all believers have to learn that there is famine everywhere apart from the blessing of the greater than Joseph. We are told, "There was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine . . . And they came

unto Joseph, and said, give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? (Gen. 47:13-15).

Now Jacob was a man of faith, and he bitterly felt the lack of food. He wanted bread, and knew that it could only be obtained from One who was over all the land of Egypt, whatever the instrumentality might be that brought it. This Joseph was a remarkable type of Christ risen and glorified. He had been hated by his brethren, sold by them, falsely accused, put into a dungeon, and after he had been taken out of it was highly exalted. Then it was he became, by God's ordering, the dispenser of bread to preserve life -- a striking type of the Lord Jesus, our Life-sustainer. Jacob and his sons were objects of God's love and care, and they fainted for lack of "corn." They hungered for bread; nothing less than the bruised corn of wheat could satisfy and sustain them; nothing also could meet their need. Have it they must, if possible; for they were famishing; and it could be had only from the typically dead and risen Joseph. May we never separate the Scriptures from Christ, of whom they testify! Are we, dear Christian readers, panting and longing for more of Christ? Is it Christ, or something else, we are so desiring? Is it with us a settled truth that Christ, whom we have joyfully known as the Savior of sinners, is the only food and Sustainer of our soul? And can this be enjoyed without personal intercourse with Him through the Scriptures? It is a good sign when the believer hungers and thirsts for more of Christ, and has to do with Him where He now is for present blessing. Such prove that He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.

We may be sure that it is only by personal intercourse and communion with Him that we can be "strong in, the Lord and in the power of His might"; "strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus"; "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

Truly the famine is sore in many parts of Christendom. Many of God's children seem to be lean and just existing, without any power to step out in the ways of faith; and there is no hope of reviving in their souls but by having personally to do with Christ where He is. It is to be feared that many seldom read the Scriptures, and others make the serious mistake of reading the Bible as a formal routine, and rest in having done so, instead of through the Scriptures having intercourse with the Lord Jesus where He is -- "The old corn of the land." What then becomes us but to go to the true Joseph, saying, "Give us bread." Let us go hungry, faint, and needy, and He will not send us empty away; for it is still true that "He filleth the hungry with good things"; and "exalteth them of low degree." Like dear old Jacob, you may not be in utter destitution. You may have some balm and honey, spices and myrrh, nuts and almonds; but these things are not "corn," nor can they supply its place. You may perhaps see beautiful things in Scripture; you may have committed to memory some of the sweet incidents there found, be familiar with many of its remarkable historical records, have received solutions of what many call difficult passages of the Word, and know that you belong to God, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Jacob knew that he was an object of divine love and care; but he also keenly felt that, good as "balm" and "honey," "spices" and "nuts," were in their proper places, they were not "corn," and could not satisfy his pressing need. He therefore said, "Go again, buy us a little food." But about this the patriarch, like many now, made a grave mistake; for he did not imagine it was to be had "without money and without price." It is true that, through the tender mercy and care of Joseph, it did not hinder food reaching them,

nor did any of them conjecture why the money was returned in every man's sack. When, therefore, they next went for food, Jacob said, Take a present of the best fruits in the land . . . and take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight (Gen. 43:11, 12).

All this shows how little they knew the heart of Joseph, or the goodness of God in sending him before them to preserve life. And is it not often the same now? Does not a legal spirit so invest some minds in having to do with our Lord Jesus for present blessing, as if His goodness could only flow to us on condition of something worthy of it on our part? But, like Jacob and his sons, such have to learn that He does not feed and sustain us because of our goodness or ability, but because – "'Tis His great delight to bless us: Oh, how He loves!"

Yes, He freely and lovingly strengthens and cheers those who wait upon Him, and returns all thought of creature-righteousness into their own bosom. All He wants is a heart to have to do with Him; as He said, "If any man open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Be assured, beloved Christian reader, it is not the discovery of beautiful things in Scripture, the solving of intricate questions; but it is Christ, of whom the Word testifies, who is the food of our souls. It is not "a little balm" or "honey," "spices" or "myrrh," "nuts" or "almonds," that can sustain and nourish our souls, but "the old corn of the land" -- having personally to do

with Christ Himself, who is now crowned with glory and honor, and soon coming to receive us unto Himself. Most surely we believe that with many the famine is sore in the land. The unbelief as to the presence of the Holy Spirit on earth, our need of Him, and the supposed competency of the natural mind for searching, receiving, and communicating the deep things of God, close the door of access to the true Joseph's store. It is when men and the world are rightly considered by us according to Scripture, and it is settled by us that there is nothing for our souls in what is seen and temporal, that we are in a state for looking to the fulness of Christ as the only source of supply for our spiritual necessities. When this is not clearly held, the believer easily glides into the refinements of the world for present comfort; such as science, literature, the fine arts, or its so-called innocent amusements, which are often stepping-stones to the coarser, and more absorbing and soul-damaging, departments of the world socially, commercially, politically, and religiously. Our first pursuits in the morning generally indicate where our hearts are. The children of Israel had to gather their daily food before sunrise, or they would be too late; and if the believer can rise from his bed and go about the business of this life before he has looked up to the Lord, and turned to the Scriptures which testify of Him for renewal of the inward man, it is more than probable that his heart has got away from God. Nothing can possibly make up for a lack of food, for "Christ is all"; and those who really live upon Him can say, "Farewell to cold and dry formality and routine," can detach themselves from worldly religiousness and every false way, and say - "None but Christ to me be given, None but Christ on earth or heaven."

Do not many of the religious books of the day bear evident marks of a famine of the word of God? After reading pages, we have sometimes said, "There is no ministry of Christ here. Where is food for souls?" And why do we thus speak? Is it merely to expose the barrenness of the pages? Far be the

thought; but rather to warn Christian writers and readers against wasting their time and energies and money in that which neither honors the Lord nor feeds souls. We are sometimes reminded of the prophet's words, Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness (Isa. 55:2).

Oh, the untold blessedness of looking up without a veil to our Lord Jesus Christ on the Father's throne, who is Head over all to the Church which is His body, and finding joy, sustainment, and comfort in the contemplation of the infinite perfectness of His person, work, excellencies, offices, fulness, and glory, as revealed in Holy Scripture! Then our earnest cry will surely be "Oh, fix our earnest gaze So wholly, Lord, on Thee; That, with Thy beauty Occupied, We elsewhere none may see!"

We are convinced that it is not charity to refrain from looking this weighty subject fairly in the face. That Christians generally are longing after more of Christ, and that many of the books of the present day give a solid ministry of Christ to souls, we fear is far, very far, from being true; but until such is the