

## Why We Break Bread

Why do we meet here every first day of the week for the breaking of bread? and why do we find so much pleasure, so much profit, in the exercise? Very much is involved in the answer of these questions. We meet here because Jesus of Nazareth has commanded it; and we regard his commandments as binding, because the works he did bear witness, in every reasonable construction of them, that God sent him and gave him power over all flesh to carry out the will of God, as he said. Those works were not mere works of goodness: they were works of power—works of a kind to compel even Nicodemus, “a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews,” to say,

*“Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”*

Those must have been extraordinary works which, in the space of three short years and a half, enabled an unknown artisan, from the hills of uncultured and reputationless Galilee, to fill the country with his fame, and bring upon him the combined opposition of Jewish and Roman authorities. They were works to which Jesus himself appealed, saying:

*“The works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me . . . If ye believe not me, believe the works . . . If I had not done among them the works, which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.”*

The nature of them is plainly indicated in the reply of Jesus to the messengers of John the Baptist, when John was in prison:

*“Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.”*

These works by themselves were evidence sufficient of Christ’s authority to deliver binding commandments, even if there had been no faith-compelling sequel in the work of the apostles; but there are other reasons why we should say with the disciples that he is “Master and Lord.” He was crucified after steadily foretelling during his ministry that he would be so. Even had the matter stopped there, we should have had reasons for confidence that it would have been difficult to throw off. But after his enemies had triumphed in his crucifixion, a greater display of power than ever took place in the hands of his disciples and friends: a display intended to have a certain significance—taught by Christ beforehand to have a certain significance—alleged by the apostles to have a certain significance. Christ said:

*“Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me.”*

The apostles’ words were:

*“We are his witnesses, and so also is the Holy Spirit, that God hath given to them that obey him.”*

Paul's words are:

*“God also bearing them witness, with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.”*

The significance of the display of power that took place in the hands of the apostles was that God, who only could impart such power, was bearing witness, by means of it, to the truthfulness of the testimony of the apostles. The apostles could not have done such things as they did by their own power. They could not heal multitudes of sick folk with a word, open the eyes of the blind, cure the deaf, and actually raise the dead, which they did. They disclaimed the power altogether:

*“Why look ye on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?”*

They could declare what they knew to be true, but they could not work miracles. They declared what they knew to be true about Christ, but God wrought the miracles (Acts 19:11); they delivered the testimony which the miracles were intended to confirm. What was the testimony? In what bearing were they Christ's “witnesses” as he said they would be? Here is the glorious matter; here is the point that settles all controversy, and puts an end to all doubt. They testified that God had raised Christ; and they delivered this testimony as a matter of personal eye-witness. They had seen him many days, and eaten and drunk with him, and talked with him, after he rose from the dead. Being the testimony of a number of men, and not of one man merely, and the testimony of men whose writings show them capable, and whose perseverance in the face of opposition shows them trustworthy; and above all the testimony of men, with whom *“The Lord worked, confirming the word with signs following”* (Mark 16:20)— It follows in inevitable logic that their testimony was true, and that Christ rose from the dead.

If Christ rose from the dead, we do right to call him Master and Lord, and to obey his commandments: for none but God could raise a dead man from the grave, and this resurrection of Christ is proof to all men that he is God's beloved Son, whom men are to hear (Matt. 17:5), and by whom God will in due time judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31), of which in fact, it is an intended pledge, as the last testimony informs us. Consequently, we only act the part of reason in meeting here every first day of the week to call him to remembrance, as he appointed. Any other course is the part of ignorance, or presumption, or madness: and from such a course, only ruin and death can result.

There are other reasons, if we required them. Christ himself—what he was in himself, apart from all extraneous aspects of the case—is quite sufficient to carry conviction with every mind capable of true reflection. Who can explain such a man apart from the record that he is the Son of God? There never was such a man before or since. Look all through the ages, search every history, ransack every literature, and you will find no figure that can stand by the side of Christ—a man of whom his enemies bore witness that “he spake as never man spake”—a man who combined such humility of deportment with such sublime self-assertion; such compassion for the erring with such intolerance of the wicked; such incorruptible fidelity to truth with such

commiseration for human weakness; such zeal for God with such kindness for man; such abnegation of self-consequence with such proclamation of self-greatness; such adroit independence of speech to his enemies with such sweet and condescending simplicity of language to his disciples; such fire with such meekness; such austerity with sociality and kindness; such greatness with such lowliness; such dignity and power with such tenderness and benignity. There never was his like before him, as he stands displayed in the consummate narrative of the “gospels”; and there has never been his like since. He stands apart from all men: great, holy, harmless, undefiled. How is this? Why have we not such a man now? Why a Christ 1,800 years ago and no Christ now? Ye unbelievers, is it not one of your maxims that “like causes produce like effects”? Are not the causes at work now, according to your theory of things, the very same causes that were at work then: and why then can there be no Christ? Alas, your philosophy is all wrong. As a matter of common sense, your reading of Christ is a hopeless mistake, if indeed you trouble to read him at all. There must be an explanation of the appearance of such a man which is not to be found in the case of any other; and there is. He is the Son of God. He was not the son of Joseph, though the son of Joseph’s wife. The Holy Spirit overshadowing a virgin of the house of David has produced for us this likeness of God—this manifestation of the Father, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. This explains all and satisfies all our need in the case. It enables us to feel we are doing a wise and a good thing in breaking bread and drinking wine in celebration of his death “until he come.”

But, brethren and sisters, we need not justify our action this morning. We but glance for the confirmation of faith, and the strengthening of works, at the manifest tokens of the truth that the apostles in preaching, and we in believing, have not followed cunningly devised fables, but stand on the rock of unassailable truth—truth exactly suited to our need on all points which human wisdom is not. There are three great departments in which we experience need. There is first the intellect, or that which has to do with the acquisition of knowledge; the perception of truth; the furnishing of the understanding. Human science can do something for us here; but it does not do enough. It appeals to the lower range of the intellectual faculties only. It gives us facts of a proximate character—facts limited—facts mechanical—facts on the surface. It shows us experiments and apparatus and collections of natural objects. It invites us to look at chemical solutions, and affinities, and combinations, and at facts arranged and labelled with a tedious and burdensome nomenclature. But this does not meet our highest intellectual need. We crave to know the ultimate and highest and universal reason of things. We aspire after the infinite. The human understanding opens with supreme desire after the highest knowledge; yearns to link itself with the universal—the eternal. Science fails here. It can give us facts in the lower range, but only guesses and theories in the higher, and in the highest, refuses us even the consolation of a theory: it chills and discourages us with the word “unknowable.”

The faith of Christ mocks us not so. The faith of Christ gives us the highest knowledge, which we cannot reach by nature, leaving us to our own resources in the lowest. It tells us of the Father in heaven, as the First, and the Eternal, filling heaven and earth by the invisible energy of his irradiant Spirit, constituting an eternal and universal unit, out of which all things are, and in which all things subsist. It thus satisfies the highest desire of the highest intellectual capacity with which man is endowed. That it gives us something the intellect cannot grasp, is no drawback to the satisfaction—rather the contrary. An infinite that we could measure would not be

infinity; knowledge and power that we could fathom would not give us the intellectual rest and satisfaction that come with the knowledge of the great and unsearchable first, and only, and all-embracing Power, who is the Father in universe-filling immensity, yet heaven-enthroned personal glory—Creator of all things—the God revealed to Israel by the name Yahweh-Elohim. What if we understand not? The revelation and the demonstration of the fact is all we need. Deeper than the fact we cannot go, and will cease trying to, as we grow older and wiser. We do not understand the operation of our own mentality, yet we know it is a fact, and use and enjoy it, without distracting our brains in the vain attempt to realise to our selves the inscrutable process of mental action. That we cannot understand God is no barrier to our enjoyment of Him, but is rather an ingredient in the supernal sweetness of faith, and the satisfactoriness of a boundless action of the mind upwards.

Our next need is that which relates to motive—or the class of considerations expressed by the word “moral.” Here it is stating the case correctly to say that the faith of Christ does everything, and the wisdom of man nothing. Science tells us, with a quiet grimness, and with a very pronounced logical emphasis, though its votaries would not own to the doctrine in its frank enunciation, that the best thing we can do is to do the very best we can for ourselves, of which we are to be the sole judges as to what that is. It practically assures us that this life is the only life we shall ever have, and that in the end, it is a matter of very small moment how we may choose to live, act, speak, feel, or think. What is the effect of such a doctrine? You see it in the slow freezing that is going on through all society. It cannot be otherwise. Let a man once embrace such a doctrine, and he is powerless in the presence of the forces that originally characterise all men at the bottom. Those forces will work up from the bottom of the constitution, and establish them selves in a brutal if refined indifference to all interests but his own. Men become selfish under such an influence. Their selfishness is only tempered by the need for conciliating their fellow-men, upon whose good graces they may depend for the accomplishment and achievement of personal interests. This need for conciliation may give politeness and consideration, but it is only skin deep, and will disappear when it is no longer needed, as when a man makes a fortune and retires. The original animalism will certainly assert itself in the long run, when the sense of responsibility and futurity is withdrawn. Under such a wisdom, all nobility of character must disappear, and man become a prey to the powerful instincts of self-interest that lie like chained beasts of prey in every heart that is under wise control.

How complete is the contrast between the wisdom of man and the faith of Christ! The reflecting mind instinctively realises it at every point. The faith of Christ appeals to every motive of self-control, and induces and strengthens every effort at the attainment of all that can possibly be noble in human character. It tells us that this life is not all—that this is but a stepping-stone to a beyond—a preparation for things to come after, that will realise every aspiration of the human heart, and rectify every wrong experienced in the present state. It brings to bear the powerful stimulus of hope—hope of perfect good to come; yet, the influence of fear—the fear of Christ’s displeasure—the fear of rejection from his presence. It purifies with the prospect of a divine tribunal, at which our whole life will be made manifest in its true and actual character, and in its just and unerring issues. It opens and expands the heart with the adoration of God in fear and love of Him continually. It constrains to deeds of righteousness and mercy, when motive for both would fail if we were left to the

impulses of a decaying and self-concerned nature. Noble impulse felt in ardent youth subsides with the advance of age, and with the increase of vain experience. Nothing but the fear of God will keep it alive to the end of the day; because this brings with it a motive totally independent of our own feelings, or the attractiveness of our surroundings. The spirit of obedience—the spirit of hope—the spirit of reverence—the spirit of love towards God and the Lord Jesus Christ, will bear us through all the weakness and discouragements of human experience, and keep us steady in that patient continuance in well-doing which God will honour at the last in the bestowment of everlasting life.

In these exercises, there is a peace and a joy that are unknown in the ways of folly. Paul might well say that godliness hath promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come. With all its drawbacks, a life of faith is a happier life than that of the unreflecting hunters of pleasure. Our experience of these meetings around the table of the Lord is somewhat of a proof on this point. There are many comings together of human beings; but none ever takes place that so engages the whole man, that so soothes and satisfies the heart, as this meeting to celebrate “the love of our departed Lord.” What is the cause? There is a reason. The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ appeals to our whole nature, and touches the highest chords in the mental man. This is not so with other things. A meeting to listen to fine music, to hear a lecture on a special topic, to discuss a grievance, public or private, to promote the interests of some particular class—to do anything else that men everywhere are in the habit of assembling to do—touches but a small part, and in most cases, the inferior part of the mental man. Whereas, the loving and obedient remembrance of the Lord Jesus kindles the whole and the highest powers of our elohistic-imaged nature. There is a place for God and for Christ in our natural constitution. The highest organs of the brain crave them, and run to waste without them. This place is empty in all worldly schemes and activities: hence the vanity, the vacuity, the unsatisfactoriness of every occupation men pursue in the present evil world. There can be no peace where God is not. The constitution of things cannot allow of it. You might as well look for life without oxygen. The constitution of things is on the side of the faith of Christ. The finger of God is visible in our present organization. The way of folly is a way of misery and destruction, even now; the way of reverence, of love, of faith, of obedience, of hope, is the way of peace and joy, even in the present mortal nature. This is why the meetings for the remembrance of Christ are sweeter than any other meetings are, or can be. No such sweetness can be found in the way of human wisdom. Blight, barrenness, and darkness only are experienced in any way that excludes God, our refuge, and Christ our everlasting hope.

Our other need—our last need—in a sense, our greatest need—is physical. We are burdened with a weak ineffective nature, which is slowly, but infallibly, tending deathwards, and which obstructs the mental man in his upward flights. We need renovation. We need the introduction of some element of power into our organization that will give vigour, efficiency, endurance. We yearn for perfection and immortality. It needs not be said how powerless to help in this direction, is all the wisdom and the skill of man. Science makes no pretences in this direction. It says, mortal we are, and mortal must remain, so far as it can see. The faith of Christ steps in and says:

“Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

It gives us in him an illustration of what this means, as well as a pledge of its applicability to our case:

“He that raised up Jesus from the dead shall raise us up also by Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:14).

“He shall quicken your mortal body” (Rom. 8:11).

“He shall change our vile body”;

“This mortal shall put on immortality”;

“Immortality shall be swallowed up of life.”

There is no mistaking the meaning of these simple, but precious statements. They mean that emancipation which we require from the bondage of this corruptible nature—an emancipation of which there is no promise in the direction of human wisdom at all—a prospect which comes with the faith of Christ alone.

Well may we hold on to the faith of Christ with all the tenacity of fully-formed and reasonable determination. There is no hope in any other direction. If Christ be not the Saviour, there is no Saviour. We look in vain in any other direction for the excellency appertaining to the faith of Christ. We need not look in any other direction. It is not only that on all points the faith of Christ meets our need; it is not only that it is exactly the thing we need; but we are able to go further and say, that in the state of the evidence, it is true and genuine and actual beyond all possibility of its being anything else. What the apostles saw and heard, that they declared to men and brethren everywhere over eighteen centuries ago, that all hearing and believing, might reach the wondrous fellowship of the Father of Light through the glorious Son of His love. The lapse of time makes no difference to the position of truth. Therefore are we here this morning to appropriate and rejoice in the glorious things which God hath testified of His Son.

*“Seasons of Comfort” Vol. 1*  
*Robert Roberts*