

THE HUNGRY FILLED, THE RICH EMPTIED

"He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent away empty."

Luke 1:53

Divine Providence is like a wheel and as the wheel revolves, that spoke which was highest becomes the lowest, and that which was lowest is elevated to the highest place. It seems to be one of the works in which God delights to cast down the lofty and to lift up the lowly. He hurls down princes from their thrones and lifts up beggars from the dunghill! "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low." Like the woodman with his axe, the Providence of God is cutting down the high and goodly cedars while making trees that were dry and withered, fruitful. That which is full, God empties. And that which is empty, God fills. That which is something, He makes to be nothing, and that which is nothing, He makes to be something. That which is reckoned the wisdom of this world, God makes to be utter folly, but base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen that He may elevate them and crown them with His Glory.

I am going to take our text as one instance of the general Providence of God and to use it, first, in reference to sinners. Then in reference to saints and, lastly, in reference to saints in their capacity as workers for Christ.

1. First, then, WITH REFERENCE TO SINNERS it is true that, "He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent away empty."

"The hungry. When a man is homeless, he is poor, but he may still have something in his purse with which to supply his present necessities. When a man is penniless, he is certainly poor, yet he may have just satisfied the cravings of his hunger and before the time shall come for another meal, he may be able to procure it. But when the hour has passed in which the man should have refreshed himself and he is liberally hungry, yet has no means of getting food, then he is one of the poorest of the poor! There are thousands in London who are very poor, but still, they are not actually hungry. They are brought down to poverty, but yet, by some means or other, they are able to get their daily needs supplied. The hungry man is worse off and he represents the lowest degree of spiritual poverty. When a man has lost all his former treasures of self-righteousness, when he has no merits, no strength, no might whatever—when he is entirely empty and his soul craves for what it cannot find in itself, nor earn of itself, nor by any possibility procure by its own merit or power—then is the man in the lowest state of spiritual destitution. And when he is brought to that state, then may he expect, in his experience, the fulfillment of the first part of our text, "He has filled the hungry with good things."

More than that, the man who is hungry is not only abjectly poor, but he feels his poverty in a way that does not permit him to forget it. The man who has but few clothes upon his back may, by reason of the genial weather, scarcely realize that he is wearing the garb of poverty. A man who sleeps in a miserable hut may seldom have been better housed and, therefore, may scarcely recognize that he is dwelling among the very poor. But he that is hungry has internal evidence that will not allow him to deny, nor even for a moment to forget, his destitution! So is it with certain sinners. They have within them an insatiable hunger which causes a desperate unrest. There is no peace for them—neither by day nor by night can they be at ease. Their sins haunt them and the fear of punishment dogs their heels. They long to find mercy, but know not how to seek it rightly. They would be thankful, indeed, to be saved from the wrath to come, but they wonder whether salvation is possible for them. They know they are guilty in the sight of God yet, possibly, they feel grieved to think that they do not feel as much grieved as they should—and are vexed to

think that they are not more vexed on account of their sins! All this shows very clearly how utterly destitute they must be, and how truly they may write themselves down among the spiritually “hungry.”

I hope I am now addressing some who are in this condition. Dear Friends, you are well aware that there is no good thing in you, yet you wish there were. Sometimes you fear that you have not even the desire to be right. To be able to confess your sins with a proper tenderness of conscience seems to be a task beyond your powers. You say that you wish you could repent and could believe—but I think you are repenting and believing all the while! But even if you are not, this only proves how abjectly poor you are spiritually and how far you have gone astray from God—and how lost, how undone you are! And then comes in this blessed message of our text, “He has filled the hungry”—that is, such sinners as you are, so full of needs—“He has filled the hungry with good things.”

How is it that the hungry get filled while the rich are sent away empty? I think it is, partly, because the hungry are not to be satisfied with anything but bread. There are many in the world who spend their money for that which is not bread—and they are content with an unsubstantial diet. But a really hungry soul knows that it needs bread and will not be put off with anything else. When a soul really feels the pressure of sin, it needs to have it pardoned, and it will not be content with anything less than pardon. It needs peace with God, and it will never rest till it gets it. The soul that once hungers after God, the living God, will not be put off with ceremonies and so-called “sacraments.” It needs Christ, Himself! It needs to hear Him say, “Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven; go in peace.” You can pacify those whose desires are only whims, but when men’s desires are based on such voracious appetites as the hungry have, you cannot satisfy them by the clatter of plates and dishes, or the rattling of knives and forks, or even with the sight of food. They must have it to eat—they will not be put off without it! They cry until they get it and, therefore, they get it, for God hears their cry and grants their request. If a man’s prayer is of such a character that only Sovereign Grace, real pardon and true salvation will content his soul, then he shall not be put off with anything else, but he shall have that for which his soul craves. Such a man prays with one of our hymn-writers—

*“Gracious Lord, incline Your ear,
My requests vouchsafe to hear.
Hear my never-ceasing cry,
Give me Christ, or else I die!
Lord, deny me what You will,
Only ease me of my guilt!
Suppliant at Your feet I lie,
Give me Christ or else I die!
You have promised to forgive
All who in Your Son believe—
Lord, I know You cannot lie.
Give me Christ, or else I die!”*

How vain a thing it is for a man to boast of the privileges he enjoys rather than of the use which he has made of them! How many say, like the Jews of old, “The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord are these,” because they think they belong to an orthodox denomination or they are members of a church which is correct in its creed, or they attend a ministry which God has greatly blessed to the salvation of souls. Ah, Sirs! But if the Creed is not believed in your heart, and if the ministry is not blessed to you, your boasting is as vain as that of one who was clothed in rags, died in poverty, but who boasted of the wealth of London! Or of the man who shut his eyes, but who, nevertheless, boasted of the light that shone upon his countenance. Unless you use your privileges. Unless you get through the external husks into the

very spirit and kernel of them, instead of boasting, you have reason to be ashamed and to hide your heads! But the truly hungry soul is not satisfied with privileges and opportunities—he wants Christ! To sit in a place of worship to hear a Gospel sermon, he counts to be a favor, for he is very humble, but it is a favor that cannot content him. His soul cries, “Lord, give me Christ! Give me salvation! Give me assurance to know that my many iniquities are cast behind Your back, to be remembered against me no more forever!” He cannot be content with anything short of a full Christ for his poor empty spirit!

Further, a hungry soul is likely to get the blessing it craves because it is an importunate soul. You know that our Lord Jesus Christ, in His parable of the widow and the unjust judge, set forth the prevalence of importunate pleading with God. And, on another occasion our Lord used the figure of one who, though not himself hungry, was able to satisfy the hunger of a friend who had unexpectedly called upon him when he had nothing to set before him. But, by his importunity, he obtained for his friend the food that he needed. Yes, and let a man really have the fear of Hell before his eyes and a sincere desire for reconciliation with God—let his soul be really hungering after peace with God through Jesus Christ—and he will be at Mercy’s door both night and day! He will hammer away at the knocker and give God no rest until He puts forth His hand and gives the Bread of Life to that poor starving suppliant. Yes, it is holy importunity that wins the day—and the spiritually hungry man gets the blessing because his importunity gives success to his pleading with God!

I feel sure that there are some in this place who, knowing their need—being painfully conscious that they have no good thing of their own—are hungering after eternal life. I trust that this hunger will grow into a craving that will never be satisfied until you get what your spirit wants. I pray God that you may never be comforted till Christ comforts you—never get peace till He becomes your peace, never feel that you are safe till you get into the very heart of Christ—and never suppose that you are clean till you are washed in the Fountain filled with His blood! Beware of getting peace apart from Christ! Always be afraid of a hope that is not grounded upon Him, for it is far better to continue to hunger and to thirst than to be satisfied with the dust and ashes of this world’s religion, or this world’s pleasures! O you hungry ones, hear the words of the text and be encouraged—“He has filled the hungry.” Look at that blessed word, “filled.” He has not merely given them a little refreshment, or administered some temporary consolation to them, but, “He has filled the hungry”—given them all that they can wish for, all that their souls really need! Turn to this blessed Book of God and see what promises are there for needy souls. Do they need pardon? There is plenteous forgiveness! Do they need adoption? “They shall be My sons and my daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Do they need comfort? There is the Holy Spirit, Himself, to be their Comforter. Do they need anything on earth or in Heaven? Then it shall not be denied to them, seeing that, in giving Christ to them, God has given them all things! “He has filled the hungry.”

It is a blessed thing to see the man who was once spiritually hungry, after he has had his soul filled by God. How he rejoices! He dances like David did before the Ark—no, more than that—his soul seems as though it would dance into Heaven itself with glorious leaps of overwhelming joy! As Christ is mine and Christ is All, I have in Christ all that I can ever desire! It is a blessed fullness, a Divine satiety, a heavenly satisfaction which the Lord gives to us when He makes our youth to be renewed like the eagles by filling our mouth with good things!

We must notice one other word in the text. “He has filled the hungry with good things.” I shall not be altering the text, but only giving its true sense if I say that He fills the hungry soul with the best of things. They are positively good and they are comparatively good—better than all the good things of the world. And they are superlatively good, for even Heaven, itself, has no better things than God gives to poor hungry souls when they come to Him by faith in Jesus. We are apt to think that if men are starving, the most common kind of food will do for them as long as they are able to keep away from death’s door—but it is not thus that God deals with the spiritually hungry. He spreads the table bounteously, royally, with the best of food and fills the hungry with good things—not simply with a good thing, but the word is in the plural, “with good things.” Their needs are many, so the mercies given to them shall also be many! Their needs seem to be as many as

their moments, but the mercies of God exceed their utmost needs! All their capacious souls can wish, they shall find in Jesus Christ, who shall be their All-in-All.

The text, you observe, refers to the past, but it may be taken for granted that what God did yesterday, He will do today—and what He does today, He will do forever, so far as it is necessary and right. And as He is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever,” all the blessings that He gives to His people shall be continued to them as long as they need them. Some of us can say that we were filled with these good things 20 years ago, and we have never again hungered as we hungered then. The Lord has satisfied our souls by giving us Christ—and we are fully content with Him! His own word is true to us, “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” God is still filling the hungry with good things. There are many in this house who can testify that in answer to prayer, they have had their griefs relieved and heavenly comforts granted to them and, poor Sinner, God is willing to do the same for you! If you are hungering and thirsting, come unto Him, for there is as much Grace in Him today as there ever was! So come, just as you are, and trust Him—rely upon Him and you, too, shall be filled with good things!

The other half of the text, in its reference to sinners, I shall touch upon very briefly—“The rich He has sent away empty.” Oh, how many sinners there are who think themselves rich! According to their own valuation, they are rich in merit, but the Gospel has nothing to do with merit! It only deals with misery and, therefore, it sends them away empty because it does not conduct its business on the lines that they approve. There are many sinners who are so rich in their own estimation that they will not take Christ and His Cross for nothing. David knew enough to say to the Lord, “With the froward You will show Yourself froward. For You will save the afflicted people, but will bring down high looks.” If a man thinks that he is so good that he does not need the Gospel, God regards him as so vile that the Gospel brings no message of mercy to him until he humbles himself and repents. Jesus said, “They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Of all the sins that can happen to us, perhaps the deadliest of all is that of not being conscious of having any sin. A good old Scotchman used to say that there was no devil in the world so bad as having no devil at all, and that not to be tempted was the worst sort of temptation. I agree, and not to be conscious of any sin is, perhaps, to be at the furthest point from God to which any human being can go, for, the nearer we are to God, the more conscious we are of our own shortcomings and the more earnestly do we struggle to overcome every atom of sin which we discover to be within our souls.

“The rich” are those who are far from being hungry—they have enough, and to spare. Instead of going down upon their knees, like beggars, to ask mercy from God as a charity, they talk proudly about what they deserve, what gooddeeds they have done and what they mean to do in the future and, therefore, they thank God that they are not as other men are.

Now, what becomes of these sinners who think themselves so rich that they have no need of the good things with which God fills the hungry? The text does not simply say that they are not fed. It does not say that the door of Mercy is shut in their faces, but it says that they are sent right away from Mercy’s door because they have no right to stand there! Why should a man be allowed to pray when he has nothing to pray for? These rich people are sent away from Mercy’s table because they do not want to feed on Mercy’s fare. Why should they sit there and uselessly occupy places where hungry ones might sit and feast? So they are sent away.

And, mark you, it is an awful thing to be sent away from the Gospel. And it is a remarkable thing that the only people who are sent away from the Gospel are those who consider themselves spiritually rich. You who think yourselves so excellent, moral and amiable. You who cannot see any fault in yourselves. You who think you are going to Heaven because of your good deeds—the Gospel not only does not open its door to you, but it even sends you away from its door! And how does it send you away? The text says, “The rich he has sent away empty.” Empty even of what you oncethought you had! I only hope that the gracious meaning of the text may be fulfilled to some of you and that while listening to the Gospel, you may be made to feel that, after all, you are not

spiritually rich, but that you are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” It will be the best day’s work that was ever done for you if you are brought to realize your true position and come to Christ confessing your abject poverty! For, as Joseph Hartwell says—

*“’Tis perfect poverty alone
That sets the soul at large.
While we can call one mite our own,
We have no full discharge.”*

We know what happened to the two debtors. [See sermon Number 3015, Volume 52—THE TWO DEBTORS—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge at <http://www.spurgeons.org>.] “When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.” But if they had had anything with which they could pay, there would have been no forgiveness vouchsafed to them. Oh, for such an emptying that you may afterwards be filled with good things!

But there are some who are sent away from hearing the Gospel with the same conceit of fullness as they had before—and they are allowed to remain empty without discovering their true condition. This is a dreadful state for anyone to be in—to go on deceiving one’s self and thinking all is well for time and eternity—and only to find out one’s fatal mistake where the discovery will come too late! “Woe is me,” cries the self-righteous professor, when he wakes up in the world to come and finds that he is shut out of Heaven—“Woe is me that I should ever have fancied that I had a sufficient store of good things for eternity, yet now I have not so much as a drop of water to coat my tongue and I am tormented in this flame! Woe is me that I am banished forever from the Presence of God, and from the glory of His power—‘sent away empty!’”

O my dear Hearers, may this text be fulfilled to you in a gracious sense, and not in this sense of terrible justice! One of the two it must be, for if you are “rich” as the text uses that term, you must be “sent away empty” in one sense or the other. I pray that instead, you may be filled with good things because the Spirit of the Lord has caused you to hunger and thirst after righteousness!

II. I shall now briefly use the text WITH REFERENCE TO SAINTS.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, if your experience at all tallies with mine, I think you will have found that the first clause of this portion of Mary’s song is most true to you in your spiritual experiences. I find that whenever I am hungry—that is to say, conscious of my utter unworthiness, weakness, insignificance—then it is that Christ is most precious to me. The promises are peculiarly sweet, the Covenant of Grace is a dainty morsel and the assembling of myself with the Lord’s people brings me to the King’s banqueting table! Is it so with you? When you are hungry, do you get filled with good things? You remember when you were under the Lord’s chastening hand and much broken in spirit through bodily pain, how precious that promise was, “You will make all his bed in his sickness”? You were laid aside both from the means of Grace and the cares of business life—and your soul had time for thought and meditation—and in its hunger, the Lord was made very sweet to you. You remember when you were poor, some years ago, when you had to live from hand to mouth, what blessed times you had with your Lord and Master?

You are supposed to be better off now, but you are really worse off if you do not have so much of Christ as you had then! You used to, then, take the promise, “Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure” in a more literal fashion than you do now. A message which came to your soul with quickening power was this, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” You were hungry then, so your Lord filled you with good things. Every now and then the pangs of this hunger seize us—our spirits sink, our confidence grows dim through the smoke of our sin and we get such a sense of our sinfulness as we have not had, perhaps for months. We feel as if we ought never to have made a profession of religion. We are so ashamed of ourselves that if we could ship with Jonah to go to Tarshish, we would be glad to flee from the Presence of the Lord and from the presence of His people, too! At such a time as that, if we hear a Gospel sermon preached to the very chief of sinners, if the preacher opens his mouth

wide concerning Sovereign Grace, and forgiving mercy, and the cleansing power of the precious blood of Jesus, oh, how welcome the message is to us! We go to the sanctuary, not to criticize the preacher, but to seek spiritual food for our souls—and if the preacher does the work which God gave him to do, we are filled with good things!

But, on the other hand, those who reckon themselves to be spiritually rich are “sent away empty.” Yes, “sent away empty” from a full Gospel! How many people there are who have such peculiar tastes—they call them such refined tastes—that there are only one or two ministers whom they can hear in a radius of twenty miles! It is a sure sign of a bad spiritual appetite when you must always have little dainties all to yourself, or, in other words, when the old-fashioned Truths of God become distasteful to your palate. There are two things that I always like to see on the table—whether at breakfast, dinner, or tea—they are never out of place. And those two things are bread and salt. And the old-fashioned Gospel, like bread and salt on the table, ought to be in every sermon! And those whose souls are in a right spiritual condition will always want to hear it. There are some who crave fancy cookery—this dish must be prepared after the Plymouth fashion and that dish must be spiced according to some other mode. And if it is not made according to the last new fashion in theology, there are some who cannot feed thereon. Oh, to be brought down from such richness as that and to be made spiritually poor! I am sure that our Bibles would be a hundred times richer to us than they are now if we were a hundred times poorer than we are—by which I mean that the Bible would be more truly to us what it really is if we had a truer sense of what we really are. As we went down in our own esteem, it would go up, and the Doctrines of the Bible, the Promises of the Bible—yes, and even the Precepts of the Bible—would possess a wonderful sweetness to us if we had a greater spiritual hunger. Solomon said, “The full soul loathes honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.” There is such a thing as getting full of our own graces, full of our own prayers, full of our own sermons, full of our own good works, full of ourselves—and what state can be worse than this? It is being blown out almost to bursting. Then, Soul, empty yourself of yourself! And when you think of yourself as you ought to think, you will abhor yourself. You will see no good in yourself whatever, but you will see the black fingerprints of your fallen nature even upon the bright alabaster works of Divine Grace within your soul—and you will mourn over even your best things because you have defiled them. When we become thus empty, God will fill us with good things.

III. Now, lastly, I believe, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, that our text is true WITH REFERENCE TO CHRISTIANS IN THEIR CAPACITY AS WORKERS FOR CHRIST.

Give me hungry dogs to hunt with and give me really hungry workers to work with for the Lord Jesus Christ! I mean, men and women who are dissatisfied with the present spiritual condition of the nominal Christian Church, dissatisfied with the progress that is being made, earnestly longing for something better, determinately set on doing something that shall be for God’s Glory and the good of the people—crying and sighing for the conversion of souls, not satisfied with ones and twos, but wanting to see the Kingdom of Christ come in all its power and the will of God done on earth as it is done in Heaven! Give me men who will not slumber although the professing Church of God slumbers! Men who cannot rest because sinners do not find rest in Christ! Men who have no peace because Christ has not become the sinner’s peace! Give me such men, for they will be filled with good things. A Church that longs for the blessing and will not be content without it, will get it, but, on the other hand, the “rich” church which says, “We have got the blessing. We are doing very well. We cannot see anything in which we could improve—we preach the Gospel, we have all the usual agencies, they are all conducted with propriety and with a measure of success. Everything goes on exceedingly well. On the whole, we, perhaps, are ahead of the rest of the churches—we ought to let well enough alone and not try to get up excitement, or be seeking after what is not attainable and attempting such great things that we are pretty sure to fail in our attempts.” Such “rich” people will be “sent away empty.”

Self-satisfaction is the death of progress. Contentment with worldly goods is a blessing, but contentment in spiritual things is a curse and a sin. What did Paul say? “Not as though I had already attained.” Some of us think, “If we could get as far as Paul did, we would be satisfied.” But Paul said, “Not as though I had already attained,” and then he added, “Forgetting those things which are behind”—why, some of us wish we had such things to remember! But he wished to

forget all that he had done and to think only of what remained to be done—"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Oh, for this sacred forgetfulness, by way of contentment, of all successes and achievements so as still to be pressing forward! I would that every Believer had, for the Glory of God, that spirit which is never satisfied, but always cries for more! I would have the hearts of Christians insatiable as death and the grave, for how can we stand that men should be forever lost? How can we be quiet while Hell is being filled and souls are perishing day and night? How can we be at ease while God is blasphemed, while Christ is unknown in a great part of the world, and where He is known, He is not loved? How can we be contented while the black Prince of Hell seeks to steal the crown rights of King Jesus? Contented and satisfied? Never! Until all over this, our highly-favored land, Christ shall reign as Sovereign Lord! No, not then, nor till in every continent and island the nations of the whole world shall have heard the Gospel and vast multitudes have prostrated themselves at Messiah's feet in loyal and loving adoration!

Up, saints of God, from your resting places of inglorious sloth and begin to cry aloud, and spare not! Come to God's Throne with a sacred spiritual hunger, for thus shall the Church of God be filled with good things! May God, in His Infinite Mercy, bless this message and HIS shall be the praise and Glory forever! Amen.