

## **Christ the Teacher - Christian in the World**

**By F. M. Perry**

As you know, the overall theme of this lectureship is "The Spirit of Christ - Christian in the World." Under this overall theme I have been assigned the subject "Christ the Teacher - Christian in the World."

First, let us consider Christ the Teacher as He lived on earth. What does the scripture reveal about Him as a teacher?

Nicodemus came to Jesus and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." (John 3:2). Today, it is clear to all who read the New Testament accounts of Jesus' life that He was a teacher come from God.

In Matthew's account of Jesus' sermon on the mount, Matthew said, "His disciples (that is, His taught ones, His pupils) came to Him. And opening His mouth He began to teach them" (Matt. 5:2). So Jesus was a recognized teacher. Those to whom He spoke knew they were being taught. "The multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." (Matt. 7:29). So He was an unusual teacher compared with the usual Jewish teachers.

More than just unusual, however, He was superlatively skillful as a teacher. He used all the available tools of teaching to get His lessons across. He often used the discourse, or lectureship, method of delivering a lesson. He used mass media, we dare to say, from the standpoint that He spoke when He could to large crowds in order to make a single lesson be heard by many people. He went into the synagogues where Jews gathered to speak to many at once. He taught in the Temple in Jerusalem. And He even attracted crowds to Himself by performing signs and wonders, then taught the crowds that gathered. But also, He was always ready to teach in one on one situations, and He

had many teaching encounters with single individuals.

A preacher I heard once said Jesus used visual aids for His lessons. In the midst of one of His teaching sessions, didn't He stoop down, and with His finger write on the ground (John 8:6). By the way, that's the only record of Jesus ever writing anything with His own hand, isn't it?

But He really did use visual aids of the word picture type. His parables and story examples stimulated one's mind to see moving dramatizations illustrating His lessons. He spoke word pictures of the lilies waving in the fields, sheep following the shepherd, broad and narrow city gates, a publican with bent head in prayer, a beggar lying at a gate with dogs licking his sores. He used the things which happened around Him as teaching situations. He used the crowds of people and even individual people as "visual aids."

Almost one third of all His sayings preserved to us are parables that He spoke. They were very concise, using memorable events from common life to set forth truths in the spiritual realm. We long remember today, as did His hearers in the first century, the stories like the Prodigal Son, the Ten Virgins, the Sower, and the Good Samaritan. They have hung in the minds of millions for almost 2000 years.

He utilized the commonest objects and incidents around Him to illustrate His lessons: the sewing of a piece of cloth on an old garment, the bursting of an old skin bottle, children playing in the marketplace, the destruction of a house in a storm. There never was speaking so simple, yet so profound, so pictorial and so absolutely true.

He did not practice teaching like most professional teachers today, who go out to a school classroom and teach for several hours a day, and then go home and do something else. He taught all the time, in every aspect and every incident of His life. His very manner of life was part of His teaching. He picked a group of 12 special disciples who lived with Him almost constantly during the 3 1/2 years of His ministry. He taught them in travel on the road, in boats on the sea, in meals they ate together and, undoubtedly in meals they missed together. He exposed them to human

nature and to the treachery of Satan, and sent them out on limited commissions for experience.

He was not a one track teacher. He had many lessons on many tracks going simultaneously. While He was making a speech to a multitude, He was simultaneously preparing the scene to employ a miraculous sign designed to teach other things to the multitude, to teach even deeper lessons to His disciples, and finally, through the record in the Bible, to teach every creature in every nation throughout the entire Christian age. His lessons were so designed that they taught divine truths to those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness, and, at the same time they convicted sinners, judged the unrepentant, and in the last analysis, fulfilled all righteousness necessary to the purposes of God.

While He planned and carried out His personal schedule and time table to take Himself to a death on the cross, He brought about the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies of His life. At the same time He chose and trained those who were to be His special apostles, keeping them with Him in close personal relationships every day for the entire time of His ministry.

At the same time He preached repentance and baptism for the remission of sins to the Jews at large to prepare them for the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. He carried the weight of all God's purposes centered in Him, purposes designed for all eternity. And He withstood tremendous opposition, rejection, and misunderstanding, not only from His enemies, but also from His beloved apostles.

I am sure that Jesus was the perfect teacher. He was God come down to us in the flesh. He had the perfect message to teach. He had clear and perfect objectives and goals laid out to accomplish by means of His teachings. He had perfect techniques. He was perfectly organized in everything that He did. Although the world thought He was a failure as a teacher, because He was rejected and put to death, He actually was completely and perfectly successful. He was a manager in full control of all forces to carry out the purposes of God. Jesus was the perfect teacher.

We could take the approach that we Christians in the world should study Jesus as a teacher and try to emulate Him. We could try to learn His techniques and use them so that we too can become great teachers. We could become great teachers in our own right, so let's study the techniques of the greatest teacher and use Him as our model.

But this is a very worldly way of looking at our Christian mission of teaching in the world. First we must be taught by Jesus, and we will soon learn that He does not want to develop traits of human flesh. Such human traits always oppose Him. Christ offers us no glorious life in terms of greatness in the world. We can become great teachers in the eyes of the world and end up hindering instead of helping Christ.

So I think it is wrong to try to become a great teacher by trying to confiscate the perfect techniques of Jesus. We may become a great teacher in the eyes of the world, but we may be exercising only our own power. We will not be serving Christ in that way.

Most of our clever human traits have to be overcome and done away with if we are to serve Christ. Of course, we have some human traits that will never leave us, nor should they. Each of us will always be a unique human creation of God. And God wants to put His treasure in earthen vessels of fleshly people. But people who will serve God with Christ must have their fleshly traits wrought upon and changed by God before they are suitable.

One important point I want to make is that Christ is the teacher, and there is no way that we humans can take the place of Christ as the teacher. We are to go and make disciples, but it is disciples of Christ that are to result. We are to teach in our Christian lives, but the teaching is simply for God's creatures to observe what Christ commanded. Our teaching is simply to get people to listen to Christ the teacher.

So what is the Biblical way for the Christian in the world to develop so that he can serve Christ? Let's search for an answer to that question. Let us start by examining some basic premises, basic truths, and foundations.

Let's go to the verse suggested as a theme for this lectureship, Philippians 1:27. Paul said to the Philippian Christians,

"Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or only remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

Paul says we're dealing with the "gospel of Christ." So first and foremost, in the conducting of ourselves, Christ is involved. The "gospel," the "good news," of Christ comes from the "Word of God." So we are involved with God and His Word. Christ is the Word of God personified, so the Word is one of the personalities with whom we are involved. The Word is another manifestation of the one called "the Christ."

It is important that we think of the meaning of Christ as the Word personified. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The fact that the Word is Christ, and Christ is the Word, and the Word became flesh, is of utmost importance to the Christian in the world. Christ is the Word. Christ is the Teacher. Christ teaches the Word. The subject that Christ teaches is Himself.

Among the triune personalities of the Godhead, Christ is the Word and has been from, and even before, the beginning. Christ is both the communicator and that communicated. In that sense, Christ is the teacher from God to all that God created. Peter alluded to Christ as being the teacher even in the time of Noah when he said in 1 Peter 3: 18-20, "Christ in the Spirit went and made proclamation to the spirits ... who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water." It was the Spirit of Christ who guided the preaching of Noah just before the flood.

The Word is that which God spoke. In these last days God has spoken to us in His Son (Heb. 1:1). Although Christ has always been the Word

of the Godhead, even from all eternity, there is something different and unique about Christ, the Word, in these last days. That unique thing is this: In these last days, the Word became flesh. Christ came to earth and lived and taught in the flesh. That fact is basic and its implications must be understood by Christians in the world if they are to serve God.

Watchman Nee said this truth: "From Old Testament times to the New, God is always found speaking. He spoke in Old Testament days; He spoke while the Lord Jesus was on earth; and He continues to speak in New Testament days. God has a prime work to perform on earth, which is to utter His own Word. If the Word of God is taken away, then almost nothing is left of God's work. No Word, no work! Once the Word is removed the work of God ceases immediately, for God operates through His Word; He treats His Word as His work. The work of God is filled with His Word." (Watchman Nee).

And the Word is Christ.

How does God utter His Word? What is God's method for presenting Christ? Here is something very special and remarkable and exciting. God's Word is spoken through the mouth of fleshly man! God's method for presenting Christ is through fleshly man! God could speak directly by Himself, and then He would have no need for a fleshly man to minister Christ. But, God has seen fit to have His Word delivered by man. And, since He does, the human minister of the Word becomes a real concern.

As we look through the entire Bible, we note three different ways God has spoken through man. First, in the Old Testament God's Word was spread by the prophets. Secondly, during that brief life of Christ on earth, the Word spoke for Himself. The Word was spoken by a very special man, the Lord Jesus. Thirdly, now in these last days of God's New Testament, God's Word is propagated by the Apostles and certain inspired writers of the New Testament, and by the Christians who answer the call of " the great commission."

First, in Old Testament times prophets spoke according to visions they

received from God. The Holy Spirit gave the Word to individual prophets and so controlled the prophets so that there could be no error in God's Word as propagated by them. By and large, God set aside the individual feelings and thoughts of the human prophet and gave him revelation. The prophet neither added his own opinion nor mingled his own feelings or thoughts with God's Word. With some exceptions, God simply used the Old Testament prophets as mouthpieces.

Second, when the Lord Jesus came to earth, the Word became flesh (John 1:14). Everything Jesus did and said were all God's Word. The way God's Word was spread through the Lord Jesus is entirely different from that through the Old Testament prophets. Earlier God merely engaged man's voice to propagate His Word. Even John the Baptist, the last of the prophets, was but a voice in the wilderness. But with Christ the very Person is the Word of God. In the Old Testament the Word and the man were two separate entities. In the incarnation of God's Son, however, the Word and the man were one. God's word became the man Jesus. And suddenly the Word had human feeling, thought, and human opinion, because Jesus was truly human. Being the Son of God, Jesus also kept the message truly God's Word. This was unique and happened only because the man was God come in the flesh.

If man's opinion had entered into God's Word during the Old Testament period, that word would have ceased to be the Word of God. For in the instant that human feeling, thought, or opinion is mixed in with God's Word, the word turns imperfect, impure, and unclean. It is the ruination of God's Word.

With the Lord Jesus, however, God's Word used not only a man's voice but his thought, feeling and opinion as well. His human thought was God's thought. So too were his feeling and opinion God's. God did not want His Word to be merely word; He wished it to be like a Person. He delighted in having His Word become flesh.

In the Lord Jesus, God's Word possessed human feeling, thought, and idea; yet it remained God's Word. Isn't this a great principle then: God can make it possible for His Word to be unimpaired by the flesh and the

feelings of the flesh. The presence of human feeling does not necessarily ruin God's Word. God's Word is ruined by the human feeling only when such feeling is inadequate.

Herein, of course, lies a tremendous problem for every human being except that one perfect human, the Lord Jesus Christ. No one's fleshly attributes are adequate to express God's Word. But in this one special Man, the Word became flesh. This Man's attributes are fully adequate. When His fleshly characteristics are blended with God's Word they fulfill rather than spoil the Word of God.

Watchman Nee expressed it this way: “None has ever spoken like Jesus of Nazareth, nor will any ever afterward speak like Him. He knows absolutely no sin. He is the Holy One of God, and He is wholly of God. The Word of God is upon Him because He is the Word become flesh. The Word of God has taken up personality. It is united with a man's word. And when that Man speaks, God speaks. How glorious is this union! This is the ministry of Jesus.” (Watchman Nee).

Third, in these last days, Christians are called upon to preach and teach the Word of God. How is the Christian in the world to carry this out? In no way can today's Christian take the place of the Lord Jesus and perfectly exemplify God's Word in his life. Yet God wants to put His treasure in earthen vessels and have those earthen vessels serve Him in the ministry of the Word. God wants to put Christ in us and have Christ continue to teach through us.

The Apostles of Jesus and the inspired writers of the New Testament are examples of earthen vessels serving God in the ministry of the Word. None of them were equal to the task set before them. None of them were holy as is the Lord Jesus. But God put His Word into them and dealt with their human imperfections in such a way that their ministry is effective.

Their ministry is different from either the Old Testament ministry or the ministry of the Lord Jesus Himself. The ministry of the Apostles is God's combination of the ministry of Jesus Himself added to that of the



Old Testament prophets. The New Testament ministry of the Apostles is God's revelation plus God's use of human elements. The flesh of the Apostles would not have been adequate for the ministry of the Word. Indeed, their flesh would have been detrimental to the Word, except that God wrought upon their flesh for the sake of conveying His pure Word. In the work of the Apostles the Word of God was blended with the human elements of the Apostles and the writers of the New Testament.

We see that this is true (that each writer of the New Testament possesses his own idiosyncrasies.) Each book possesses its special human phraseology and has its particular topics. On each book the writer has left his indelible mark; yet all are the Word of God. The New Testament is full of human elements; still it is the Word of God. God's Word is entrusted to man and is conveyed through that man's elements.

God does not turn man into a tape player installing in him a pre-recorded tape for him to send out verbatim. Surely the human characteristics of the writers and the Apostles would have been detrimental to the Word of God. But God worked with them until their human elements did not damage God's Word. This is the ministry of God's Word in the New Testament age.

I do not suggest that the Christian in the world today is inspired or dealt with by God in exactly the same way as were the Apostles and writers of the New Testament. We now have the written New Testament, complete, "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). They did not have the written Word at that time complete and collected. It was through these Apostles that God delivered His written Word. God dealt with those Apostles in some special ways necessary to the "once for all" delivery of His pure and unadulterated Word.

Today that written Word reminds us constantly of the Lord's ringing commission to us, "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation"...(Mark 16:15). "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"... (Matt. 28:20). This indicates that God's Word is still entrusted to man and is to be conveyed through man's elements. God does not turn us into mere tape players. He wants us to convey Christ

in every element of our lives. Christ the Teacher Himself taught in every avenue of His fleshly life. God wants us to let Christ continue to teach in every "word and deed" of our fleshly lives. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," said Paul (Col. 3:17). The Word of God is to be released through man. It is God's Word, yet it also involves human elements. As a consequence, the Lord must deal with the human elements of man in order to make them suitable. God desires to change us to make us suitable. If we will not be changed, God can't use us. But the Lord can and will change us, if we will permit.

God has made man significant in His work! "God employs no way other than man to deliver His Word!" Hold that thought. "God employs no way other than man to deliver His Word, that is, to deliver Christ." (Watchman Nee).

Now, don't flyaway on thoughts of fantasy about the importance of man. Don't jump to the conclusion that man can contribute to the content of the Word of God. It is God's Word. The Word is Christ. Christ is the Teacher. But God wants to use the fleshly Christian in His work of delivering His Word to mankind. And God does use those who consent to be used in God's way. God decides the way fleshly man will be used. Man cannot define his own job guide in God's work. God presents to us our job guide and in it we are called upon to do only one thing, the thing that we have been uniquely designed by God to do, and that is to choose, to make our free will choice to accept and carry out God's instructions for our lives. We are not forced to choose God's way. We can say no to it. With respect to God's will for us, we can accept it or reject it. However, if we reject it, whether we know it or not, we automatically accept Satan's job guide for us. We have a choice of alternatives, God's way or Satan's way. But that's all the alternatives we have. There are no decisions that don't matter in our lives. Our decisions, everyone of them, either lead us on the flow chart of life towards God's objective; or they lead us on another flow chart towards death, towards Satan's objective.

That's why, in Phil. 1:27, Paul says that we are "striving" together for the

faith of the gospel. If we have to strive it is because we have opposition. There are those who oppose us, so we have to strive. Satan himself is the other great personality involved in this great drama of life. Satan opposes God, he is the author of all oppositions, and he seeks to do it by subverting us away from God's purpose for us.

But God is in charge. God is the great Manager. He will accomplish His objective. He will not fail. Satan's objective will not be accomplished. Satan is already bankrupt and, perhaps, he knows it. But, if he does know that he is bankrupt, he won't tell us. He tries to hide that fact. He constantly seeks to have us render decisions in his behalf. And he inevitably achieves some success with us, flawed son's of Adam that we are. But, praise God, God is patient and God loves us. God does not terminate us at our first wrong decision. Thank God, Christ the Teacher teaches us the true nature of this business of life. We can change our minds and base future decisions on the absolutely true knowledge that Christ reveals to us.

In Phil. 1:27, we note further that Paul tells us, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." As we have already said, this presents a real problem. How can we obey this command to act as though we are "worthy" when we are not "worthy?" We said a while ago that we can only serve God if we let God change us and make us suitable for the ministry of the Word. Paul alludes to the way that God makes us suitable right here in Phil 1:27. He says, "Stand firm in one Spirit" What does Paul mean by one Spirit?

Going back a few verses to Phil 1:19 Paul spoke of the "Spirit of Christ" and in verses 20 and 21 he said, "Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Paul intimates that his fleshly body is suitable for the service of Christ because his body, even his entire fleshly life, is subjected to Christ for no other purpose than to let Christ live in him. Paul was "standing firm in one Spirit" and that Spirit was the Holy Spirit of Christ. The "one Spirit" in which we are admonished to "stand firm" is the Holy Spirit of Christ.

Now we all have personal spirits of our own. When Paul says, "I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one Spirit" he seems to be speaking of more than one spirit. He is admonishing that many spirits act like one spirit, is he not? He is speaking to the Philippian Christians, each of whom has a personal spirit. So in that sense there are many spirits involved. Is he just saying that all of you get together and act as one? He is saying that, in part. But he is saying far more than that, is he not? He is not only calling for unity of spirits, he is specifying the basis for the unity. You are not to be united spirits just for the sake of unity, but you are to be united with the Holy Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit of Christ will characterize your unity so that the Spirit of the life of each and every one of you is the Spirit of Christ – so that you can say, individually and collectively, "For me, to live is Christ." That is what we are to "stand firm" in. Stand firm in Christ.

In Christ's teachings through Paul, especially in the book of Romans, we are taught that man is inherently unworthy and unable to do anything on his own for God except to yield himself to be recreated holy by God so that God then can use him as a vessel. This is made clear in Romans 6 beginning in verse 3. "We have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

Christ died, was buried, and was resurrected for us. We were in Him when He died; we were in Him when He was buried; we were in Him when He was raised to life again, even though we were not yet born at the time. He allowed it all to happen to Him in our stead as a free gift to us. We accepted that great gift of our own death, burial, and regeneration when we obeyed Christ in baptism.

Now, to us who have been baptized He speaks further through Paul. He says in Rom. 6:6, knowing this (that's tantamount to a command), know this--"Our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." We must know this, says Paul. Our old self was crucified with Christ.

Not only must we come to know this, we must "Even so reckon (or consider) yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." That word "reckon" or "consider," means that we must take our knowledge of the death of our old man and factor it into our active lives as absolutely true. It must be "reckoned" in our account book as "money in our pocket" something real, as something we can and must act on.

First, "know" that you have been crucified with Christ and raised with Christ. Then "reckon" that you are dead to sin, but alive to God." It is true. It is real. You can and must order your life after these real facts.

Then, we read in Rom. 6:13 the next step in our path of progress towards usefulness in the Lord's service. "Present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." Now your new man is holy and can be an instrument of righteousness in God's service. You didn't do anything to make yourself holy. God did that through Christ and offered you a place in His service based on that. You were called upon only to make some decisions, decisions involving the surrendering of your life to Christ.

First, you were given knowledge to accept. Know that your old man is dead. Know that your new man is alive to God. Then, you were asked to put those facts into your active life. Reckon it to be so. Then, you were called upon to present yourself before God for His use as He sees fit. Know, Reckon, Present. You really haven't been required to do any work on your own. You are called upon just to accept what Christ has already done and let Him live in you, and use the members of your body to get His work done.

There is only one other step we can and must take and that was mentioned in Rom. 6:3. "Walk in newness of life." This "walk" is further explained in Rom. 8:4, "Do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Rom. 8:11 further explains, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you."

It is a true principle of God that there is no life without a life giving spirit. It is the spirit that gives life to the body. "The body without the spirit is dead", said James 2:26. God gave each of us a personal spirit when He imparted fleshly life to us. That's how God imparted fleshly life to us. Now, when we believe, repent, and submit our fleshly bodies to be baptized, God gives us life in a much more complete and important way. He gives us eternal spiritual life which is life like He has. He imparts that eternal spiritual new life by giving us the gift of His Holy Spirit to dwell in us. He gives life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you, said Paul. And in Rom. 8:14-16 Paul went on, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God ... and the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

So the last step, after the steps of Knowing, Reckoning, and Presenting, is of Walking as "led by the Spirit." We do not have to determine where to walk. We do not decide where we are going in our lives. Indeed, at that point we cannot take charge of our own lives. The Spirit of Christ decides where we will walk because He leads us.

Christ the Teacher taught, "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it." (Matt. 16:25). It was Christ teaching through Paul when Paul said, "Walk according to the Spirit" in a life where Christ's Spirit and your own spirit can bear witness together that you are a child of God. It is our union with the one Holy Spirit in which we must stand firm. And the only path of progress to standing firm is the path of Knowing, Reckoning, Presenting, and Walking.

As Christians in the world, that is the only part we have in God's work. As we go out into the world to be Christian teachers, or whatever Christ wants us to be, the only work we can do for Christ is that summarized in Romans 6 under the action commands of knowing, reckoning, presenting, and walking. Christ Himself is the Word and the Teacher and our job is to let Him work through us, doing our best not to hinder Him.

Let me complete this presentation by exploring some examples of Jesus' teachings, to give us a little more insight into the marvelous teaching work of Jesus, and to review an important lesson that He taught His apostles and wants to teach us as well. Turn to Matthew the 14th chapter and let's start studying in about the 14th verse. We find Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias in a deserted place, except a great multitude had followed Him there. The multitude had been with Him all day.

At this point Jesus had before Him what we might have called a bad situation. He kept the multitude with Him there in that deserted place right up to nightfall. After Jesus had been with the crowd all day without the disciples, the disciples came on the scene and they immediately sized up the situation as a bad one.

"The disciples came to Him saying, the place is desolate, and the time is already past; so send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Now Jesus was fully in charge of the situation. He had purposely engineered the situation. He knew what He was going to do. He had been waiting for the disciples to get there so He could use the situation to teach them a lesson. So He starts a highly organized lesson for them which He carries out step by step, first step, second step, third step, etc.

Step one - "Jesus said to them, they do not need to go away. You give them something to eat!" He had a job ready for them to do and He commanded them to do it. He knew what their reaction would be. "And they said to Him, we have here only five loaves and two fish."

Now He is ready for step two - "And He said, Bring them here to Me." They brought the few loaves and fishes to Jesus. That was all they had. Note that Jesus handed them right back to them, after they had brought them to Jesus.

Then step three - "And the disciples gave to the multitudes and they all ate, and were satisfied. And they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets." What lessons!

There were that day a number of lessons for the multitude. They saw a notable miracle which should have convinced them that Jesus was from God. They learned of Jesus concern for them and His care for their welfare. A truth to be deduced was that such a One from God could give them spiritual care as well as physical care. Undoubtedly there were lessons to be learned from His organization of the whole affair. With a hungry multitude one might expect a chaotic situation. But Jesus managed them in an orderly fashion, having them all recline on the grass. And then He made sure that nothing left over was wasted.

But the lesson for the disciples was even more notable. In almost first grade, ABC fashion, Jesus had just instructed them that whenever He gave them something to do, they could do it with His help, even if it appeared impossible to their finite human minds. If the Lord tells you to do something, first gather together all the resources that you have to work with, meager as they might be, then present them to the Lord. When the Lord hands the resources back to you, start doing whatever the Lord told you to do. The Lord will do the real work. He multiplies human offerings to make them adequate to get His jobs done. We disciples are just vessels to distribute the Lord's blessings.

The conclusions should be in the spiritual realm, in the conduct of Christians in the world carrying out the teaching mission of Christ on earth. Christ is the teacher. The Christian, the Christ-one, is in the world serving as the vessel for Christ's ministry during these last days.

Did the disciples understand the lesson that day described in Matthew 14? Apparently not. A short while later Jesus staged for the disciples a repeat teaching situation almost identical to the one just completed. He had another multitude with Him and He told the disciples to feed them. They acted as though they didn't even remember the first occasion. He repeated the whole lesson, step by step with this new multitude of people. This is found in Matthew 15, and we call it the feeding of the 4,000.

Did the disciples learn the lesson then? Apparently not! They understood that Jesus was trying to teach them something, but they were



confused. For a while later in Matthew 16, Jesus mentioned to the disciples the word, leaven, saying, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." All the disciples could think of was that leaven is used in bread and that Jesus had told them on two occasions to feed multitudes with bread. They were now on another trip with Jesus and they had taken no bread with them. So they began to discuss among themselves why Jesus had made a comment about leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Was He warning them about getting bread from the Pharisees and Sadducees? They said, "It is because we took no bread."

"But Jesus, aware of this, said, You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up? How is it that you did not understand that I did not speak to you of bread?"

This was such an important lesson that Jesus was still teaching aspects of it to the disciples even after He was resurrected, during the 40 final days he walked on the earth before His ascension into Heaven. John records in John 21 the meeting of Jesus with His disciples on the shore of the sea of Tiberias. Remember that Jesus, on that occasion, prepared a meal of fish and bread on the shore of the very same sea where He had fed the multitudes. Again He ate the fish and the bread with the disciples there on the beach. And then He asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me? ... Do you love Me? ... Do you love Me?" Each time He concluded His exchange with Peter with the commands, "Tend My lambs ... Shepherd My sheep ... Tend My sheep."

What then did it mean to Peter and the apostles, and what does it mean to us now, when Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:19-20).

We are given by Christ the Teacher a teaching mission. Many of us

answer, "All we have here are five loaves and two fishes. The job is impossible!"

But Jesus says in effect, "I am with you always. Bring your meager loaves and fishes to Me. When I hand them back, start with faith to hand them out to the multitude." The work will be done by the Lord. Don't we even have faith enough to serve as His vessel of distribution.

Christ is the Teacher. The Christian, the one who belongs to Christ, is in the world. Christ wants to teach through you!

By F. M. Perry. (A speech delivered on March 19, 1986 at Soldatna, Alaska to a fellowship of Christians gathered from throughout Alaska.)