

Luke 9:10-17
June 16, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Since there are so many needs in the world, how do we know where to devote our time, effort, and money? [Let people engage]

Transition: Meeting the needs of others can look overwhelming at times. We are going to read a very familiar story. Let's see how this text informs us when we encounter people who have needs, and we're not sure we can handle it. Let's begin.

BOOK:

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

¹⁰ When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, ¹¹ but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.

¹² Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here."

¹³ He replied, "You give them something to eat."

They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd." ¹⁴ (About five thousand men were there.)

But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵ The disciples did so, and everybody sat down. ¹⁶ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people. ¹⁷ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [God can provide exceedingly and abundantly; Jesus showed compassion to the needs of the people; We have access to the unlimited resources of Jesus (human logic vs spiritual eyes); Jesus looked up to acknowledge that God is the source of our provision]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage; perhaps there will be a tension around "*When is it right to say "no" to the needs and demands of people?*"]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Jesus wants to bless people; He's compassionate; nothing is impossible for Him; Jesus knows how to multiply our resources; Jesus is concerned with every aspect or detail of our life;]

LOOK:

Q: How are we to live in light of this text? The Lord's command, "You give them something to eat" is simply a restatement of the Great Commission. The lesson is that if we give Jesus what we have, He can multiply it to feed the spiritually hungry multitude.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 205-206). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The conclusion (vv. 10–11). The Apostles returned and gave a glowing report of their ministry, and Jesus suggested that they all take some time off for rest (Mark 6:30–32). As the popular speaker Vance Havner used to say, “If we don’t come apart and rest, we’ll just come apart.” Their mission of preaching and healing had been demanding and they all needed time alone for physical and spiritual renewal. This is a good example for busy (and sometimes overworked) Christian workers to imitate.

Attracted by the signs Jesus was doing, the crowds would not leave Him alone, but followed Him from the cities. When Jesus and the Twelve landed, the crowd was already there to meet them, and Jesus had compassion on them and ministered to them (Matt. 14:13–14). The Son of man could not even take a day off!

Feeding (Luke 9:12–17)

Our Lord was not the kind of person who could teach the Word and then say to hungry people, “Depart in peace, be ye warm and filled” (James 2:16). The disciples were only too eager to see the crowd leave (Luke 18:15; see Matt. 15:23). They had not yet caught the compassion of Christ and the burden He had for the multitudes, but one day they would.

When you combine all four accounts of this miracle, you find that Jesus first asked Philip where they could buy enough bread to feed such a great crowd. (There could well have been 10,000 people there.) He was only testing Philip, “for He Himself knew what He was intending to do” (John 6:6). In the crisis hours of life, when your resources are low and your responsibilities are great, it is good to remember that God already has the problem solved.

Jesus started with what they had, a few loaves and fishes that were generously donated by a lad found by Andrew (John 6:8–9). Did Andrew know the boy? Or did the boy offer his little lunch without being asked? Before we ask God to do the impossible, let’s start with the possible and give Him what we have. And while we are at it, let’s give thanks for mothers who give their sons something to give to Jesus.

The Lord looked up to heaven, the source of our daily bread (Matt. 6:11), gave thanks, and blessed the food; and then He multiplied the few loaves and fishes. Jesus was the “producer” and His disciples were the “distributors.” The amazing thing is that *everybody* was served and satisfied, and there were twelve baskets of leftovers, one for each of the disciples. Jesus takes good care of His servants.

This miracle was more than an act of mercy for hungry people, though that was important. It was also a sign of our Lord’s messiahship and an illustration of God’s gracious provision for man’s salvation. The next day, Jesus preached a sermon on “the bread of life” and urged the people to receive Him just as they had received the bread (John 6:22–59). But the people were more interested in their stomachs than their souls, and completely missed the spiritual impact of the miracle. Their desire was to make Jesus King so He could give them bread for the rest of their lives! (John 6:14–15)

After Jesus returned to heaven, the disciples must often have been encouraged by remembering this miracle. It teaches us to have compassion, to look on problems as opportunities for God to work, and to give Him all that we have and trust Him to meet the needs. If we do all we can, He

will step in and do the rest. “Let God’s promises shine on your problems,” said Corrie Ten Boom, and that is good counsel for us.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 228-229)

JESUS’S FEEDING OF THE 5,000 (9:10–17) (Matt. 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; John 6:1–14)

The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle of Jesus which is recorded in all four Gospels. In many ways it is the climax of Jesus’ ministry of miracles. It was designed to produce faith in His disciples.

9:10–11. Luke now called the Twelve **apostles** (*apostoloi*). **Jesus** had so named them previously (6:13). Presumably the apostles **returned** to Jesus’ home base at Capernaum. **Jesus took them to Bethsaida**, across the Jordan River to the northeast on the Sea of Galilee. (Others, however, say Bethsaida was a town now known as Tabgha, southwest of Capernaum.) As usual, **the crowds ... followed Him**. Jesus continued to preach the message of **the kingdom of God**. He had sent the Twelve to preach, and He **healed those who needed healing**. The miracle which immediately followed showed climactically that Jesus is the Messiah, fully able to provide for His people. Herod had raised the issue as to who Jesus is (9:7–9). Later Jesus again raised the same issue (vv. 18–20). The feeding of the 5,000 (vv. 10–17) clinched the truth for the disciples that Jesus truly is the Messiah.

9:12–17. The people who had gathered were apparently not local people for the disciples wanted Jesus to **send the crowd away so that they could find food and lodging**. This would not have been necessary if the people had lived nearby and could have returned to their homes. When Jesus told His disciples to **give the people something to eat**, He was showing His men that it was humanly impossible to satisfy the crowd. The disciples admitted this and noted that **food** would have to be bought for the people if they were to feed them. The disciples stated that there were only **five loaves of bread and two fish**, clearly inadequate for such a large group of people. The **5,000 men** (*andres*, “males”) is no doubt a round figure, not counting the women and children who were present (Matt. 14:21). If the latter were also counted, the total might have been over 10,000.

After having the people **sit down in groups of 50s**, for ease in distributing the food, Jesus thanked God the Father and gave out the food, using the disciples as waiters. **Twelve basketfuls of broken food pieces** were collected at the end of the meal, perhaps thus providing a basket of food for each disciple to eat. The word used for baskets (*kophinoi*) was considered typical of Jewish commerce. The seven baskets from the feeding of the 4,000 (Mark 8:8) were a different kind of basket. Jesus, by this act of provision, had shown Himself sufficient for the nation Israel. He is the One who could provide prosperity if the people would believe His message. This miracle is reminiscent of Elisha when he spoke the Word of the Lord and a small amount of food fed many people, with some left over (2 Kings 4:42–44).

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 271-275). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

After Herod's question about Jesus (9:7–9), Luke recorded the disciple's return and the feeding of the five thousand. This miracle is the only one found in all four Gospels that occurs in Galilee. This nature miracle, like the stilling of the storm (8:22–25), deals with the question, "Who is this one?" (8:25 and 9:9). In this story Jesus clearly is "a man accredited by God to you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did among you through him" (Acts 2:22). Even as the storms of sea posed no problem for Jesus, neither would a shortage of food. Unlike most miracle stories there is no description of the people's reaction. This miracle was meant primarily for the disciples and would enable them to answer the question Jesus asked in Luke 9:20. In Luke a meal setting is especially appropriate for understanding who Jesus is (cf. 24:30–31).

Comments

9:10 When the apostles returned. The term "apostles" is used here for the Twelve (9:1, 12) who were "sent out" (*apostellō*) in 9:2. They also are called "disciples" in 9:14, 16. Therefore, although "apostles" and "disciples" are more inclusive terms than the Twelve, the Twelve nevertheless were the apostles and disciples par excellence, even as they were the "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (1:2) par excellence.

They reported to Jesus what they had done. Luke abbreviated Mark's "done and taught" (Mark 6:30), but no doubt he meant both. When the apostles reported what they had done—i.e., their ministry of exorcisms, preaching, and healing (9:1–2)—we assume they received Jesus' approval, although this was not explicitly stated.

Then he took them ... and they withdrew. Jesus' purpose, to get away from the crowd, is more clearly stated in Mark 6:31.

To a town called Bethsaida. Mark and Matthew have "a solitary place." Bethsaida lies just north of the Sea of Galilee on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Although it was technically part of Gaulanitis, it was usually associated with Galilee (cf. John 12:21). In Mark, Bethsaida is mentioned right after this account (Mark 6:45) and just before the account of Peter's confession (cf. Mark 8:22, 27–30), and Luke also followed this account with Peter's confession (Luke 9:18–21). See the discussion in 9:1–50. This miracle in the neighborhood of Bethsaida will be referred to in 10:13–14.

9:11 But the crowds ... followed. Compare Matt 14:13 and John 6:2.

He welcomed them. The term "welcome" or "receive" was a favorite with Luke.

And spoke to them about the kingdom of God. The Twelve's preaching ministry (9:1–2) continued Jesus' preaching (cf. 4:43; 8:1; Acts 1:8). For "kingdom of God" see comments on 4:43; Introduction 8 (2).

And healed. The healing ministry of the Twelve (Luke 9:1–2) was a continuation of Jesus' healing. Luke's failure to mention exorcisms indicates that this aspect of their ministry was less significant for him than preaching and healing. See comments on 9:6.

9:12 Late in the afternoon. Late in the afternoon, around sunset, was when the main meal was eaten. It is doubtful that we should see in this statement an allusion to the time of day when the Lord's Supper was celebrated because each Evangelist used different terminology to state this, and their wording does not resemble 1 Cor 11:23.

The Twelve came. The switch from Twelve to apostles and again to Twelve indicates that for Luke these terms were interchangeable.

Send the crowd away. The singular "crowd" agrees with John 6:2, but not with Luke 9:11 (Cf. Matt 14:15 and Mark 6:36). Although the Twelve had the practical needs of the people in

mind, they had forgotten both Jesus' miracles (Luke 8:22–56), which they witnessed, and their own mission.

Because we are in a remote place here. “Remote place” is literally *desert place*, but it need not imply a vast desert region like Sinai. Here it refers to an uninhabited area in the vicinity of Bethsaida. The disciples' suggestion to dismiss the crowds so they could acquire food in the neighboring villages indicates that the location envisioned was not remote desert but simply an uninhabited place near villages and towns such as Bethsaida.

9:13 You give them something to eat. Some have seen here a possible allusion to 2 Kgs 4:42–44, but Luke made no clear reference to this, and the Greek is far from exact.

Five loaves of bread and two fish. The number is the same in all the parallel accounts. The miracle of the feeding of the four thousand, however, speaks of seven loaves and a few small fish, which reinforces the conclusion that it was a separate event.

Unless we go and buy food. The disciples were thinking quite logically in terms of the natural order of things, but they were forgetting the presence of the one who is Lord over the natural order. Luke and his readers knew that the Lord of the wind and the water (8:22–25) is also Lord over bread and fish.

9:14 About five thousand men were there. Luke introduced the number earlier than Mark and Matthew to make this a more orderly account.

In groups of about fifty each. Nothing should be read into this number, for passages such as Exod 18:21, 25 are not close parallels.

9:15 The disciples followed Jesus' command, even though they still thought that the crowds should have been dismissed (cf. Luke 5:5). Sometimes obedience must precede understanding.

9:16 “Gave thanks” (*eulogeō*) is better translated *blessed*. All five verbs occur in the parallels in Mark 6:41 and Matt 14:19. In the account of the Lord's Supper all but “looking up” are found in Mark 14:22 and Matt 26:26. Luke 22:19 also has four verbs but “gave thanks” (*eucharisteō*). There are four verbs in 1 Cor 11:23–24 as well, but they are “took ... gave thanks (*eucharisteō*) ... broke ... said.” The feeding of the five thousand was seen by the early church to prefigure the Lord's Supper and the coming messianic banquet (cf. Luke 12:37; 13:28–29; 22:15–16, 18, 30). They are, of course, distinct from one another, but this account does remind the reader of the Lord's Supper (see comments on 24:30) even though the latter does not have a miraculous multiplication of food. No doubt the wording of the Lord's Supper would have been sufficiently familiar to Theophilus and Luke's other readers that this sequence of verbs would have triggered an automatic association with the Supper.

Gave thanks. This “blessing” in Luke is associated with the bread and the fish because the pronoun “them” follows the verb (*eulogeō*). Mark and Matthew, which lack the pronoun, focus the blessing on God. It has been suggested that “them” may be an accusative of respect and that the text should thus be translated “blessed [be God] with respect to the bread and fish.” This, however, would be a more appropriate action and interpretation after, rather than before, the multiplication of the loaves and fish.

Broke. This aspect of the meal would especially call the Lord's Supper to the minds of Luke's readers since it was often called the “breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; cf. also Luke 24:29–30).

Gave. “Gave” is literally *was giving*. Whereas the previous verbs indicate punctiliar action (aorists), the passing out of the food is durative (imperfect). One should not read into the text that this “giving” symbolizes how the early church leaders would be able to “feed” and meet the needs

of the church. By omitting any reference to the distribution of the fish, Luke heightened the analogy to the Lord's Supper (cf. Mark 6:41).

9:17 They all ate and were satisfied. The word "satisfied" is the same word used in the beatitude of Luke 6:21. There is more than enough in the kingdom.

Twelve basketfuls. This involves a basket for each of the Twelve, but the main emphasis is on the great abundance.

Broken pieces. This term (*klasmatōn*) is used to describe the bread of the Lord's Supper in *Didache* 9:3–4, which indicates that the feeding of the five thousand was very early seen to prefigure the Lord's Supper.

That were left over. The description of the collection of the leftovers is not meant to teach stewardship or to show that Jesus did not litter but to display the surpassing greatness of Jesus. He does "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power" (Eph 3:20). The abundance witnesses both to Jesus' power and to his grace.

The miracle proper ("how" Jesus actually did this) is not explained. The tradition and the Gospel writers all understood this to be a miracle and thus beyond rational explanation. All rationalistic attempts to explain the event (behind Jesus hidden from the crowd was a cave full of supplies that provided the bread and fish; or the generosity of a small boy [John 6:9] who, sharing his food, caused others who had more than enough to share their food as well, so that all had enough) violate the clear meaning of the text. Luke and the other Evangelists clearly intended to demonstrate Jesus' supernatural, miracle-working power.

The Lukan Message

This story, like most miracle stories in the Gospels, serves a Christological function. This is made evident not only by the miracle itself but by Luke's placement of the account. It follows and answers Herod's question, "Who, then, is this I hear such things about?" (Luke 9:9). It is itself followed by Jesus' own question, "Who do you say I am?" in the next account (9:20). The feeding of the five thousand is a somewhat atypical miracle story because it does not describe the crowd's reaction. The miracle was meant for the disciples, and it would enable them to answer the coming question in 9:20. (This also suggests that the great omission of Mark 6:45–8:26 is not accidental.) He who can provide a "messianic banquet" (cf. Isa 25:6; 65:13–14; Pss 78:24; 81:16) must be the Messiah. The disciples had thus been given the answer to the question, "Who is this Jesus?" He is the Christ of God (9:20)!

There is an eschatological teaching in this passage as well. If the miraculous feeding is understood as a partial fulfillment of the messianic banquet, then in some way the messianic age must have begun. This fits well with the concept of God's kingdom as a present reality, which is explicitly taught elsewhere in Luke (see comments on 4:43). As already seen, the feeding of the five thousand foreshadows the Lord's Supper, which in turn prefigures the coming messianic banquet when the Son of Man returns. The firstfruits of the kingdom already were present, however, and being experienced in this miracle.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 9:10–17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.