

Jesus is STILL Feeding People

Luke 9:10-17

When was the last time that you found yourself standing at the dead end road of life wondering how you had got there and where God was? Have you stood on the edge of possibility, looking at the vast expanse before you and feeling utterly inferior or incompetent for the task? Have you ever wished that you had more to offer? Maybe that's how the disciples felt as evening fell on the grassy plains of Bethsaida to the East of the Sea of Galilee.

The week leading up to this trip to Bethsaida had been both exhausting, triumphant and painful. Jesus had sent the disciples out in teams of two with the power and authority to preach and to heal. He had told them to go with almost nothing to their name and simply to trust that God would provide for their needs.

The disciples returned triumphantly. They had experienced the first taste of what it was to be apostles, those sent out with the express purpose of proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God. And now Jesus takes them to a deserted place to recharge. But the retreat is cut short when a huge crowd shows up, over 5000. And this sets the stage for the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Anyone know what it is? That's right, the feeding of the 5,000.

This should give us a clue as to how very important this miracle is to the Lord. Remember there is a *message* in every *miracle*, so let's read this text and see what the Lord is saying to us today. The title of the message is: "Jesus is STILL Feeding the Crowd."

10 And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done. Then He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

11 But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing.

12 When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here."

13 But He said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people."

14 For there were about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of fifty."

15 And they did so, and made them all sit down.

16 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude.

17 So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them.

As we think about this miracle there are four things I want us to learn about Jesus:

1. JESUS ATTRACTS CROWDS—BUT HE WELCOMES EACH PERSON

Jesus and His disciples were actually trying to get away from the crowds. Jesus could have asked the crowd to go home because He needed some private time with His disciples. Instead Luke says in verse 11, **“He received them.”** I love this about Jesus. He was a people person. Helping people and saving people was His entire purpose for coming to earth. It’s like Jesus is saying, “People don’t interrupt my ministry—they *are* my ministry.”

Jesus never got upset about being interrupted by people, whether it was a single sick woman who touched the hem of his robe in a crowd, or 5000 people that showed up uninvited for lunch. Jesus is intensely interested in you and deeply concerned with your needs. He has time for you.

As Jesus was teaching and healing, the disciples began to get nervous because they saw a huge problem developing. It was getting close to dinnertime and they were in a remote area with nowhere for the mob to buy food to eat. So they say to Jesus in verse 12, **“Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.”** But Jesus refused to send the crowd away. Jesus wants to teach a lesson on faith so:

2. JESUS ASKS HIS DISCIPLES TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE—TO TEST THEM

I love Jesus’ statement in verse 13. He says, **“You give them something to eat.”** Can’t you just hear the disbelief of the disciples as they complained to each other, “What? US feed them? That’s impossible.” Exactly.

In John, we are told Jesus knew exactly what He was going to do all along. He just said this to test the disciples. There were two big problems they faced that afternoon. One was obvious but the other was more concealed.

PROBLEM #1: Lack of food

Obviously, there were hungry people and no food to feed them. They said, **“We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people.”**

They saw the problem as a lack of food, but there was another problem present that day, and it was a:

PROBLEM#2: Lack of faith

The reason Jesus gave them the “impossible” command was to simply show them their lack of faith. When you were in school didn’t you just love those teachers who would start class by announcing, “Everyone clear off your desk except for one blank sheet of paper.” We all knew what was coming next: pop quiz. Jesus does the same thing for us today. When you face the very hardest times of your lives, it’s like God is saying, “Take out a blank sheet of paper.”

The only question on God’s test is: DO YOU TRUST ME? The score on God’s test is not for His information; He already knows about our faith. It’s to show us our faith. God will allow your faith to be tested continually throughout your life, not to shame you, but to strengthen you. In James 1:2-3 we read: **“Consider it pure**

joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the TESTING OF YOUR FAITH develops perseverance.”

Jesus was creating for His disciples what Henry Blackaby in His book "Experiencing God" calls: A Crisis of belief. Now there is no question that this was a God-sized assignment. This was way beyond their capability to accomplish and if the Lord did not intervene, they would fail and fall flat on their faces.

This is the place where many followers bail out. The Lord lays a God-sized assignment before them and they say, "I'm sorry, but I can't", which leads to what Blackaby calls a "crisis of belief". The crisis of belief then is a turning point, fork in the road that demands a decision. You must decide what you believe about God and how you respond to Him.

God uses these tests to develop our character, to make us more like Jesus. When you encounter a problem—whether it's how to feed 5,000 people or how to deal with a difficult boss—Jesus wants you to respond in faith.

Glance back this main point: JESUS ASKS US TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE—TO TEST US.

Think about some things God has told you to do that seem impossible. Some of you have not yet started to give a tithe of your income to the Lord because you feel afraid that you couldn't live without that precious 10%. Or you have taken a calculator and have figured you just can't afford it. May I remind you again God's math is different from ours? Tithing is impossible, that's why God asks us to do it. It's a test, in fact God specifically says about the tithe in Malachi, **"Test me in this."** (**Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.—Malachi 3:10).**

Some of you think it's impossible to stay in your bad marriage. You feel you can't make it and you have figured out it won't work. God's Word says, **"What God has joined together, let not man separate."** I've had people tell me they don't feel love toward their spouse anymore. I say, "That's okay, just love him anyway." You might say, "Isn't that faking it?" No it's actually *faithing* it. "But, don't I have to be true to my feelings?" Why, what have your feelings ever done for you? Try being true to God; try being true to the Word of God.

God allows us to be in situations that are impossible so that we will learn to trust Him, to believe Him, to have faith in Him, to make Him known.

Some people say, "God will never ask me to do something I can't do." But I'm learning that God desires to give me tasks and assignments that are far beyond my abilities and power in order to not only reveal Himself to me, but demonstrate His nature, His strength, His kindness and His provision to a watching world. People today need to see the super-naturally visible hand of God working in and through His disciples, so that when something happens there is no question that God had done it.

God told Abraham to father a nation when he and Sarah were well beyond child-bearing years, why? To reveal Himself!

God told Moses to deliver the children of Israel through the Red Sea, why? To show Himself!

God had Gideon defeat the Midianite army of 120,000 with 300 men, why! To make Himself known!

Finally, we learn that:

3. JESUS ADDS HIS POWER TO OUR POVERTY—THE RESULT IS PLENTY

The first thing Jesus did was to organize the folks into groups of fifty. God is not a God of confusion but of order. Picture this scene: More than a hundred groups of fifty sitting on the green, grassy hills. This was better than Meals on Wheels—it was Meals on Hills. Don't overlook this little detail. Jesus wanted the people to eat together. Nobody was to eat alone. They could enjoy food and fellowship with other folks. No one in the family of God should be a spiritual lone ranger. Even the Lone Ranger had Tonto. So, Jesus organizes the crowd to receive the maximum benefit of His power.

Then Jesus proceeded to multiply the food. The equation is simple: Jesus' supernatural power added to our poverty equals plenty. Let's examine again exactly what Jesus did to multiply the food. Look again at verse 16. Every action at this point becomes important because I believe we can find five practical steps each of us can take so our "little may become plenty." We are going to fly thorough these at light-of-the-world speed, so listen fast.

YOUR LITTLE CAN BECOME PLENTY WHEN YOU:

(1.) Look up to heaven for your help.

When Jesus took the food, the first thing He did was to look up to heaven. When you face a need, don't look at the problem and don't look at your meager resources. Lift up your eyes and look to heaven. Here's great advice from Psalm 121:1-2: **"I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth."** It may be you feel overwhelmed right now with your marriage problem, your financial problem, your family problem or your physical problem because you are looking in the wrong direction? Like the song says, *"Turn your eyes upon Jesus; look full in His wonderful face; and the things of earth will grow strangely dim; in the light of His glory and grace."*

(2.) Thank God for the little that you already have.

The next thing Jesus did was to thank God for the food. It was only a tiny amount, but Jesus said, "Thank you, Father for this food." We spend much of our time asking God for *more* rather than thanking Him for what we already have.

Maybe you need to go home look around you and start thanking God for the little you already have. That's a lot better than complaining or begging God for more.

(3.) See the value of brokenness.

Brokenness is an important spiritual concept. After Jesus looked to heaven and thanked God for the food, He *broke* it. It was in this act of breaking the bread that it began to multiply. God truly values broken things. David, a broken man, prayed this prayer in Psalm 51:17, **"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."** In our materialistic culture, a broken object becomes less valuable, but in God's economy, brokenness only increases the value. The bread had to be broken before it could be multiplied; The alabaster box Mary brought had to be broken before the perfume could be poured out; The clay pots of Gideon and his 300 soldiers had

to be broken before the light could spill out; the roof above Jesus had to be broken up before the friends could lower the paralyzed man to Jesus; and the body of Jesus had to be broken before our sins could be forgiven.

(4.) Serve others before you serve yourself.

Jesus instructed them to serve all the people *first*. I'm sure every time the disciples returned for more they just knew they would be out by the time they could eat.

Here's an important lesson. If you are most concerned about meeting your own needs first, you will suffer through a pretty miserable existence. Be willing to help other people FIRST and you'll find your needs and problems don't seem quite as severe after serving others.

Mark tells us everyone had all they wanted to eat. It was an all-you-care-to-eat full service meal. But when everyone had eaten, Jesus wasn't through. There were lots of leftovers to be gathered. How many disciples were there? Twelve. How many baskets left over were there? Twelve.

God's math is always perfect.

Some of you are hungry; hungry for God, maybe hungry for food. You ask the question, does God care that my family is in need and I haven't got the funds to cover the rent? The answer is yes. It is in the darkest times that God's light shines the brightest. Some of you are standing at the dead end right now wondering where God is. He is there with you, and he has a question for you. His question is, "Will you trust me?"