

Sermon 43: Luke 9:10-17: Jesus Feeds the 5000

OUTLINE

Jesus Compassion

Jesus Provision

INTRODUCTION

There are only 2 miracles of Christ that are recorded in all four gospels, the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and the feeding of the 5000. Jesus did many more miracles than the gospels record, but few had such an impact as the feeding of the 5000. There was another less well remembered feeding of the 4000 as well, Mark 8:1-9. Here is what John tells us happened after Jesus fed the 5000, 6:14-15, 'When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.' Moses prophesied that The Prophet would come from God, Deut. 18:15; a prophet like him. Moses came to Israel when they were in bondage to Egypt and performed miracles and remember God gave the bread in the wilderness to feed them while Moses led them. Now here is Jesus, they are under Roman oppression, He is performing miracles and now also miraculously feeding them. They were so moved by this miracle that they wanted to make Him king. Imagine it, Jesus would run the perfect welfare state where all sicknesses would be healed so there would be no need for medical aid or long waiting lists for cures; and food could be provided for free. But Jesus did not perform this miracle in order to advance a political or social agenda. What purpose then does this miracle serve?

There are three things that we are going to be highlighting from this passage. Firstly, Jesus is still training the twelve, we will see Him teach them lessons about His provision, as well as His provision through them. Secondly, we want to observe the compassion of Christ. And thirdly, this miracle is a prelude to Christ announcing Himself as the Bread of Life. We will touch on these three concerns under two headings, Jesus compassion and Jesus provision.

Jesus compassion

V10, 'On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida.' The twelve apostles have just returned from their first excursion on their own. They come back to Christ and report on all that they did. No doubt there would have been smiles and amazement, they would have wondered that they had been able to do some of the thing that Jesus had done. We see something like this in Luke 10:17-20 after the 72 return from being sent out. There are many temptations in life, but few are greater than after a great success. Jesus is a compassionate and attentive teacher who takes His disciples aside for a little recuperation. The words 'he took them' are emphatic and read literally, 'He took them alone.' And they withdrew from the public sphere after a heavy period of ministry.

Jesus Himself in His ministry, even though a sinless human being needed to withdraw to be with God for times of prayer and refreshing. They withdrew to Bethsaida, literally, house of fish. Here is the first sign of Jesus compassion, compassion to those in His service and how He highlights what we need. The God who made a day for us to rest on knows that after work we need to rest in fellowship with Christ and one another. The guilty conscience says work, work, work, but God says after work there must be rest. The zealous conscience

says, give, give, give, but God says to us, give, but also receive. If Christ who was sinless needed to withdraw; and He took His own disciples after they had worked aside; then you too will need to embrace this gift of rest. Many of us admire men who have broken their health and practically killed themselves by their efforts in ministry. This is the trouble when we shepherd ourselves, and can be an error in how we shepherd others. Christ shepherds His disciples by leading them to still waters and rest.

Do you need this right now? Are you experiencing burn out? How do you know if you are experiencing burn out? If you go home and have no patience, time, energy, and could not be bothered to make an effort with your loved ones, you are possibly burned out. If you lack enthusiasm for God, His word, Church, and have no compassion for the lost having a cold heart to the needs of others, this can also be a sign of burn out. Pastors show signs of burn out when they stop caring about the needs of the people in church. Burn out results when you have to bear more emotional weight than you can carry by carrying everyone else's troubles, this is the burn out compassionate people experience. Burn out results when you physically wear yourself down because of a constant pace of frenetic activity, this is the burn out that task oriented people fall prey too. Ironically too much exposure to Netflix and Facebook, which is often indulged in for rest, the effects on the brain, and the level of emotional involvement also spend your resources. Solitude, prayer, time with Christ, or time in close fellowship with likeminded believers all being fed together, these are the things we need.

V11, 'When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.' This attempt to withdraw and recharge was unsuccessful, we see that the crowds followed Christ. Christ despite the interruption gave them a warm reception, it says, 'He welcomed them'. Not only that He preached about the kingdom of God, and took the time to heal them. Mark 6:34 says, 'he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.' Christ has compassion, He sees us in our sin, He sees that we are like lost sheep, we are vulnerable, lost, wounded and scattered and He tends to our needs. Mark's account only mentions that He taught them, Luke adds that He also cured all who had need. In His compassion He gives us the truth, and in His compassion He meets our need. We see in this account that we can come to Jesus and He will make time for us, that He will welcome us and tend to us as a Good Shepherd. If you struggle to know how He will receive you, see here His willingness to receive you; the care that He has for you; and the rich abundance He is ready to pour out upon you.

V12, 'Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, "Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place." Although Luke gives the impression that it was the 12 who raised the problem of providing for the crowds, we see in John's account that there is a longer conversation where Jesus in fact initiated conversation on the problem, John 6:5-6, 'Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?"' ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.' Philip answers that it would take 8 months wages to buy bread for all of them. Jesus knew even before the crowds had arrived what He would do and preempted the concern in the disciple's minds. He did this because He was testing them.

V13, 'But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people." Jesus

tells the disciples that they are the ones who are to feed them. Andrew is the one who points out that all they have are five loaves and two fish. These loaves would have been the barley loaves that the poorer folks ate, and would have been roll sized, they were not large loaves at all. The fish could have been freshly caught and broiled, or dried fish. Jesus has compassion on the crowds and He is training the disciples to do His will towards them. They are now faced with what seems like an impossible task, and we see that instead of trusting in God, instead of reflecting on all that Christ has already done through them, they still lack faith and are taken up with the logistics of the situation.

Jesus provision

V14-17, 'For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵ And they did so, and had them all sit down. ¹⁶ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.' We come now to the miracle itself. We are told that there were about 5000 men, that is a figure excluding the women and children, so Jesus actually fed more than the numbered men. Jesus prays a blessing over the meal. This is likely the typical prayer of thanksgiving to God that any head of the household would pray over any meal. The look towards heaven was a typical gesture of prayer for the Jews in the same way that closing our eyes and bowing our heads is typical for us. Upon finishing His prayer He broke the loaves in order to share them, and this was given to the disciples. And somewhere in the midst of these actions the bread was multiplied miraculously.

Now many have tried to protest that there is no miracle here. Modern scholarship has been filled with Liberals who have been embarrassed about the miracles of the gospels and they have sought to find ways of explaining the miracles away. a common tactic is to say that the crowds all had food, but when this little boy gave up his lunch and tried to share it with everybody, everyone else felt convicted and pulled out their own picnic lunches. They try and turn a miraculous story into a moral one. Liberalism always emphasizes morality and deemphasizes the miraculous and the doctrinal.

Others say that it was the rich women who travelled with Jesus who provided the meal, but there is no mention of them in the context.

Another attempt to minimize the miracle is the belief that Jesus broke those five loaves into tiny pieces enough so that everyone could get a piece, and it was taken in a symbolic way. This however, goes against the text which says that all were satisfied. I don't think anyone would win the vote to become King because He could break up five loaves and two fish so that every person could have a crumb.

Some have even suggested that Jesus hypnotized the people into believing that they were satisfied.

We must point out how ludicrous these theories are, they are more unbelievable than the truth that a miracle has occurred. There is a deep unwillingness to admit that there is a God, that He came down to earth, that we have to reckon with who Jesus is, that is clearly observed in the way people avoid the clear miracle of the feeding of the 5000 a miracle all 4 gospels attest to.

Now the mechanics of the miracle are a mystery. Luke does not tell us how the bread multiplied. How big a pile of bread and fish would be needed to feed so many? Did it multiply in Jesus hands, or in the disciple's hands? Did the disciples hand out what they had and when they returned to Jesus there was always more waiting to be distributed? Did it

multiply as He broke it or all at once? We do not know. All we know is that everyone knew that a miracle had occurred and they wanted to make Jesus King.

What does this miracle mean? John in his gospel gives us a lot more detail of the conversation between Jesus and the crowds. The next day after this miracle after Jesus had to isolate Himself so that their political ambitions to make Him king were thwarted, the crowds find Him again. John 6:32-35, 'Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven."³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.' This is the first of the 7 I Am sayings of John's gospel. Many of the I Am sayings have signs accompanying them. John uses the word sign rather than miracle indicating that the miracles play a role in signing something. Jesus heals a man born blind and then says I Am the light of the world. He raises Lazarus and says I Am the resurrection and the Life. Here Jesus feeds the 5000 and gives us insight into His identity saying I Am the Bread of Life. The 'I Am' part of the saying is a deliberate way of speaking echoing how God revealed Himself as 'I Am' in the OT.

Jesus here reveals to us that the manna in the wilderness was a type and shadow pointing forward to the work of Christ. The manna was from heaven and not from earth; it was the provision of God and not something that they could provide for themselves; it was a miraculous provision which brought life and sustained them on their journey; it was sweet and satisfying. Christ is the bread of heaven from God who does all of this for us and more. And Jesus tells us that the way we eat this bread is by believing.

Jesus miracle of feeding the 5000 is not all about how the church should be active in ending starvation in the world, it is all about Himself. We dare not cheapen this miracle to detract from Christ's work to talk about our own, to detract from Christ's work of giving us new creation life and abundance to emphasize sustaining fallen life.

The simple word picture of bread is no accident. Bread was the staple diet for any person in Israel, to have bread was to have life and the ability to survive. Christ alone is the one who gives us eternal life. We do not eat Jesus in the Lord's Supper for this life, Jesus himself tells us in John 6:35 that we partake of Him by believing. And those who believe we are told will never hunger or thirst again. Or to point to what Luke records, they were all 'satisfied.'

How does Jesus being the bread of life point to our needs being met in Him. The greatest need that we have is life. We are dead in sins and we cannot save ourselves. When we believe in Christ we are born again, we come alive, we receive the gift of eternal life, and this life cannot be snuffed out.

Not only are we dead we are dead in sin, we are guilty, we are sinners who have broken God's law and under condemnation. Jesus provides life for us by dying on the cross for our sins and paying our sin debts. By His death our crimes against God's law are paid for and we can be at peace with a holy God.

We must stress that this bread of life is free, that God offers it to all who will humble themselves and repent and put their trust in Christ. God saves the poor in spirit not the rich.

Not only do we receive life but He also sustains us and gives us fullness of life. What are some of the basic human needs that Christ fulfills? We all have a need for significance,

being made in the image of God, we know intuitively that life does not end in death; that we are more than evolved animals; that we are not cosmic accidents. Christ saves us into a relationship with God and renews us in the image of God which sin has marred and distorted. We feel the soothing peace of conscience as we know the happiness of holiness.

We are saved into a life of purpose. God has made us to be men and women, He has made us to be workers and parents, to be part of the church and good neighbours. We find fulfilment in doing what we are made for us we return to our Maker and His purposes. Too many are lost in depression and hopelessness as they grope around in confusion not knowing what gender they are, what morality is, what family is, what humanity is for. In Christ we are not only saved, but saved to serve and equipped with spiritual gifts with which we can serve.

We are saved into a life of being loved. Love we are told is a basic human need, we have this need met to the uttermost as we who are undeserving of love are loved with a love immeasurable.

In the OT we see that when God sent the manna in the wilderness there was not too much or too little, Ex. 16:18, 'But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat.' But look at Luke 9:17, 'And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.' When Jesus provides the bread we see that there is more than enough, a greater measure in the fulfilment than in the type.

Let me draw out some of the lessons from this portion.

We have seen the lesson of needing to refresh ourselves after our labours, the need to rest.

We have also seen that Christ has compassion for the crowds and compassion for us.

We see that Jesus is training the disciples to bring the bread that the crowds need. Jesus provides the bread and the disciples distribute it. They don't provide the bread but merely hand it out. There is an application here for us. We cannot die for people's sins, but we can be the messenger who brings the bread that Jesus provides to those who need it.

Another key lesson here is the fact that Jesus uses the poor bread from a boy's lunchbox to satisfy thousands. The coarse barely loaves and child sized portions of fish are used by Christ to great effect. This is a wonderful picture of our own lives. You may feel yourself to be a poor man's lunchbox, but put into the hands of Christ He can use it to great effect.

We learn the lesson of Christ as the Bread of life and how He gives and sustains life. He gives fullness of life.

We began this section looking at the disciples having come back from a preaching tour and their rest being interrupted. Mark 6:31 reads, 'And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.' At the end of this miracle, how many baskets of left over food was there? 12 baskets of food to satisfy 12 hungry apostles. There is a lesson here for the apostles about the Lord's provisions for them. As they distribute the bread that Christ provides, namely Himself freely offered in the gospel, not only will He satisfy and provide for those who receive Him, but for His servants as well.