



“Five Loaves; Two Fish; One Messiah”

Luke 9:10-17

September 3rd, 2018

We are going to be on the Gospel of Luke once again as we continue our series in the ninth chapter. We will see an awesome picture of the blessing that is found in the power of Jesus Christ as we dig in to the text this morning.

Among the lessons of pastoral ministries that I have struggled to learn there is this one: It is not the best idea for a preacher to go on and on talking about food while he is preaching, because some people might have rushed out of their homes without eating a good breakfast, or if they did, it is still that time when people begin to get hungry again. Stomachs might be growling, and thoughts might be turning toward lunch.

So, it might not be very helpful for the man up here to get enthusiastic about the Friday night birthday dinner he had that involved smoked tri-tip and how it was just perfect—the taste of hickory permeating the meat. There were also creamy mashed potatoes and zucchini that was cooked perfectly. He should not even talk about the apple pie alamode that came afterwards, right? That might not be a very helpful.

However, on this occasion it can't be avoided because I am going to have to tell you about one of the most amazing dinners that was ever provided. It was a fish dinner and I have to tell you about it because the Word of God lays it out before us. This is a story that many of you may be familiar with.

This is the story of when the Messiah, the Christ, provided a meal for a very large number of people. This story conveys to us an understanding of how the Lord Jesus can provide for His people in ways that they don't see coming.

In addition to that, this is a story that is going to be filled principles for those who desire to follow Christ in Christian service, serving other people in the name of Jesus. For those who are Christians, that should be all of us.

We are going to pick up this story in Luke Chapter 9 where the twelve apostles are returning from their ministry, preaching and healing throughout the region of Galilee. These men were both weary with labor and, perhaps, elated with ministry success as we think about how the power of Christ was being conveyed through them in ways that were amazing and distinct and unique.

They have all gathered back and it was time to report to Jesus all that happened in their tour throughout the region, but soon enough their staff meeting got crowded so they turned it in to something of a leadership retreat. They tried to get away but then a multitude was able to track them down.

There was a horde of people, and Jesus ministered to them. Then the sun began to go down. It was getting later in the afternoon. Super time was approaching, so what happened? Let's see how the Word of God lays it out for us in Luke Chapter 9 and Verses 10 through 17:

¹⁰On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. ¹¹When 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. ¹²Now 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." ¹³But 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." ¹⁴For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵And they did so, and had them all sit down. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Here we have this miraculous event in the life and ministry of Christ that has been popularly remembered as *The Feeding of the Five Thousand*, but even that is something of a misnomer because what is specified in this text is that there were five thousand men.

As the same story is told in the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew confirmed the fact that in addition to the five thousand, there were women and children and I am sure there were many single people. So, there were more than just the five thousand men. Some Bible teachers estimate that there could have been somewhere in the range of 15,00 to 20,000 people there, and that is a large group of people to say the least.

I grew up watching the Los Angeles Lakers. I still watch them but began watching them back when it was showtime and there was Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. They owned the NBA. I listened to Chick Hearn announce the games while the Lakers were still playing in the Fabulous Forum.

There was a certain number that Hearn would always repeat, perhaps it is burned in to your mind just like it is to mine, "We have a sell-out crowd of 17,505." Hearn said 17,505 over and over again as I would listen to those broadcasts. I also remember going to some of those games and there were so many people there. There were lines of people waiting to get in, people milling throughout the hallways, along with all the people in the area.

We are talking about a huge crowd of people, and that is the scale of what we are talking about here. It was a throng of people that was there. In the end, they were made full by

the power of the Messiah. This miracle is sometimes recognized as the high point of the Galilean ministry of Jesus, that initial year and a half where He was up in the northern portion of Israel preaching His kingdom and performing miracles to show the power of the Kingdom. This was the pinnacle of His popularity.

The same account in the Gospel of John informs us that there was such an atmosphere of wonder and astonishment after the people realized what had happened that they wanted to make Jesus king by force. They wanted Herod out and in with Jesus of Nazareth, but it was not the time for the manifestation of His Kingdom in that way, so Jesus would not let it happen.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand is the greatest miracle that Jesus performed as far as the number of people who were involved and touched by it. However, it would seem that the primary purpose of what Jesus did here was the continued development of His disciples. He was continuing to train them and prepare them to go out to serve this world in His Name.

The disciples wanted to send all the people away, but Jesus said no, that they had ministry to do. He was going to show His disciples some things. Something that is very interesting to me about this account that we read in the Gospel of Luke is that it started in Verse 10 by calling them His apostles, but then He began referring to them as His disciples again later in the text.

There is a formality about calling them apostles. There is also an authority about that title. They were His official spokesmen, His envoys sent out with His power. This was a very significant title. They were His apostles. But then the second and third reference to them as a group in Verses 14 and 16 was to call them His disciples—His learners, His pupils.

There are some things that they still needed to learn. That is just so true because Jesus wants all of us to be maturing in to ambassadors, those who can really represent Him and His truth in this world. But we are going to have things to learn until we get into glory. Then when we get into Heaven, guess what, I think we are still going to be at the feet of the Messiah learning the glory and the depth of His nature and truth.

We are disciples. We are learners, even as we are sent ones from Jesus. There are some lessons in this passage of Scripture that I think we need to take in if we want to be those who are walking with and serving Him.

I want to tell you that this passage is one that is so very special to me. I remember preaching this text early in my pastoral work, getting the chance early on to really, really dig in to it for the sake of sharing with others. When you dig in to share with others, you get this overflow into your own heart and life.

This passage made an impression on me early on and I have come back to it time and time again, learning and trying to relearn and reapply the lessons that it gives. For

anybody who is interested in serving Jesus, there is so much here for each of us to take in, whether you want to be in full time pastoral work or serve as an elder—a shepherd in the church—whether you want to serve as a deacon or deaconess in mercy ministry, if you want to be an AWANA leader, or a Sunday school leader—any kind of work that has you involved in the spiritual care of a portion of the flock of God

There are things in this text that you and I all need to take into our hearts and ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out. I think we can draw out four lessons for the ministry following Jesus. Let me preview those points for you, then we will take them one at a time. The first is what I call, gracious hospitality. The second is personal involvement. The third is obedient faith, and the fourth is divine provision.

Each one of these needs to be learned and carried out by those of us who will follow Christ. So, first let's look at the first ministry principal that we see here. That is:

1. The Principle of Gracious Hospitality

Some hospitality takes place in a home, but hospitality is the practice of welcoming people and caring for them. This can take place in a home or at a campsite or at bond fire ring or at a park bench.

Jesus and His disciples were out in the wilderness, and I wonder if you noticed the grace with which Jesus practiced this care for people that came to Him. Verse 10 and 11:

¹⁰On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. ¹¹When 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.

Here you have Jesus speaking to them about the truths of God and His nature and His ways and His rule and His reign, putting His miraculous authority on display once again.

This is such a wonderful portrait of Jesus, but there is a certain tension that is at work in what we read here because this was supposed to be something of a retreat for Jesus and His men. For weeks the apostles were out expending themselves, teaching and preaching and mixing it up with all the people. They were healing people and being close to people who were sick.

There is a joy about all ministry but at sometimes it can take it out of you too. The apostles had so much to tell Jesus about, so they were taking a little bit of a retreat. They went about five miles away to Bethsaida, then even further out to a place by themselves.

In addition to that, something else for us to remember that is in the context of this passage as we learned last week is that John the Baptist had recently been brutally murdered by Herod. John was a relative of Jesus, he was a cousin in addition to being a forerunner and a great man of God in ministry.

Reading what the Bible says, we know that also took its toll on the humanity of Jesus as He thought about the loss of John the Baptist. Heaven gained him, but the world lost him. It happened in such an atrocious way, and that was something that Jesus in His human nature as the God-man was having to deal too.

If we look at all the context about this, we could say that that was not a time for pouring out, this was time of going out and getting recharged and renewed in the sight of God. They needed to get some rest during this time of retreat. That is what they were attempting to do.

However, the crowds sniffed Jesus out. This massive group of people tracked Him down. From a certain vantage point, some might totally understand Jesus telling them He was sorry, but not now. Instead Jesus poured Himself into them once again. He welcomed them. He spoke to them. He loved them. We see Him with grace practicing this kind of welcoming spirit.

This is all epitomized in that word *welcome*. He welcomed them. The New Testament was originally written in Konia Greek and has been translated in all the languages of the earth. If you go to the underlying Greek, you will see that the same word translated *welcomed* is used elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke. It also showed up way back in the Christmas story.

I wonder if you remember in the infancy of Jesus and how He was presented in the Temple. There was a man there named Simeon. It had been prophesied that he would see the Messiah before he died. Simeon was an old man and still waiting. Then finally here came the Messiah. Simeon was given the knowledge that it was the Christ.

Scripture says that Simeon took this baby in to his arms and he held him close. You can imagine him dotting over this little baby. That is the same word! It is *dechomai* in the Greek. Jesus welcomed them in to His care, and it is such an amazing picture of the compassion of the Messiah.

By the full accounts that we get through the different Gospels, it shows that Jesus had such great compassion on these people. It was a matter of His suffering giving Him sensitivity to the needs of other people. This is gracious hospitality.

People may come to our attention who are not in our daily planner of things to do, but if we are going to follow in the ways of Jesus, we need to have sympathy for those who are hurting. We are going to welcome them in, doing whatever we can do to help them. Do you see this in the text? Jesus welcomed them.

What does that mean for us as followers of Jesus when we do have those times when we are on retreat? I wonder how many of you have a day off. I have a day off. I wonder how many of you take vacation time. I just got back from two weeks of vacation. It is a

good thing to schedule rest and recreation and down time in to your routine. God blesses His beloved with sleep. Sabbaths are good.

But what about those times where you are planning down time, alone time, or maybe being with your significant other and then suddenly people with needs start pushing in on you. What do you do?

Here is what I have learned in the years that I have been in ministry. This is just from me to you and how it has worked out for me. First, what I have noticed is that most people are very, very appreciative of the need for other people to have downtime, pastors and Christian leaders included. That is something that has always been very clear.

Something that I have appreciated is where folks might have questions, things they are going through and struggling with. But they recognize that it is your downtime and tell you that you need to go and enjoy that time and we will deal with our issues later. That is what happens for the most part.

But what happens when something crushing happens? Then what? What of the time away? I have learned a lot through the years reading things about the principles of boundary keeping, but what I have learned is that whenever I try to hold those boundaries and say no sorry, not available now, it feels like a weight that I am carrying. I have my downtime and I am holding my boundaries, but my heart is so heavy! Doing that ends up being so tiring.

Whereas if you catch wind of somebody who is hurting and suffering with a difficult situation and you carve out some time to make a phone call to them, sympathizing with them and telling them you are praying for them, not only does that person get some attention and love, but what I have noticed is that your own heart gets set free.

There is the whole upside nature of the Kingdom of God. It is when you give yourself away that you gain footing and are able to walk lightly. So, you make that call and give that attention and then you are able to enjoy your time off again. Jesus says later in this chapter, *If anybody will follow me, let him deny himself daily and take up his cross and follow me.* There is joy and life in that.

While we are finite creatures and there is an element of self-preservation in us that I think is valid, let's not forget the dominate New Testament theme of self-sacrifice and how the life of God enters in to the soul of those who live that way. I think we see Jesus here exemplifying this for us and for His disciples. Walk by faith in that, because that is what Jesus put on display with this principal of gracious welcoming.

We continue and see another principal. It is the principal of:

2. The Principle of Personal Involvement

Not only does Jesus minister to the people of this earth, but He uses His disciples, His followers—people just like you and me—to do so as well. He often uses us even though we don't feel like we have the resources. There is the principal of personal involvement as we go in to Verses 12 to 14. Let's see how this unfolds.

¹²Now 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.”

Typically, when you read through the New Testament and about the ministry of Christ, it is Jesus who is giving the commands. However, on this occasion the disciples came to the Lord and they were the ones using the imperative voice, giving Him some direction.

Perhaps after the season of ministry and performing some miracles, the disciples then had an elevated sense of their own authority because they gave Jesus a command. In the language of J. Vernon McGee, a great old Bible teacher, he said, “The disciples have once again placed themselves on the Board of Directors to tell the Lord Jesus Christ what to do.”

How did Jesus respond? The disciples told Him to send the crowd away into the surrounding villages, then Verse 13:

¹³But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.”

You just got to love that! They gave Him a command and then Jesus responded with a command of His own. The disciples told Jesus to send them away, but He said no, you feed them.

For some reason I can't help but picture Jesus putting the proverbial finger in their chest. You give them something to eat. How do you like that idea? They were like what?!? Verse 13:

¹³...They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” ¹⁴For there were about five thousand men.

They responded with a little tinge of incredulity. What!? Are you serious? What are we supposed to do? We have a few loaves and a couple of little sardine-like fish. They wondered if they were supposed to go into the town and buy food for them. That would cost a fortune. When we calculate the amount of money that would cost, it would have been about a half a year's wages.

So, the disciples felt that the people should be sent into all the villages, but Jesus said no, you give them something to eat. The disciples wanted to send them out into the nearby hamlet. What were those villages going to do with a horde like that? Bethsaida was just

a little fishing village. Simon Peter bolted from that place because there was no action there, and said he needed to get to Capernaum where there was more opportunity.

What would that village do when 15,000 people came in asking what was for dinner? It's like the Fabulous Forum emptying out into one little Mom and Pop Sandwich Shop. But the text also says to also send them to the surrounding villages, but that would only add a couple more dining places.

Where there is a critical situation of need at hand and we want to say, Nope, not for me, that's for somebody else to get involved with. I want to grant you that there are certain authorities that we can involve in some situations that may be very well be equipped to handle them better.

However, does that mean that we just wash our hands of it and not get involved, thinking it is not for us? Maybe Jesus puts the proverbial finger in our chests and tell us to get involved in that situation as well. We don't just dismiss it.

The disciples only had five loaves and two fish, but what else did they have? They had one Messiah and wherever we go as followers of Jesus, we can bring the presence of the Messiah as well who is able to do tremendous good if we are filled with His Spirit, filled His truth, and filled with His love.

So, I wonder if there is a need in the church for a ministry such as the Good News Club and we say no, not me! Listen for the voice of King Jesus saying, *Not so fast. Maybe it is you.* Be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit because He is going to challenge you to get outside your comfort zone. He is going to do that in my life and in yours.

I think we see this principal of personal involvement that the disciples tried to deflect but Jesus told them to get involved. We continue and see that the principal of personal involvement goes into the situation that we see of:

3. The Principle of Obedient Faith

That is necessary for those of us who are going to walk in the ways of Jesus as well. He is the Lord. He is the King. He is the Master, and what He says to do, that's what we do! Look at what it says in Verses 14 and 15. There were about 5,000 men:

And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵And they did so, and had them all sit down.

Initially I was thinking about titling this as the principal of Wise Management because that's one large crowd of hungry people. What is your mood typically like when you are hungry? Probably irritable, right?

What happens on so-called Black Friday? If something is 90% off, people tend to stampede. What was going to happen when that horde of people began to realize that a miracle was about to take place and that food was being passed out?

I remember being at the tram at Disneyland. Eventually, I was going to get on, but all those people got so rude. Finally, I found myself being rude, nudging out this person or that person because you got to get on somehow.

So, I think we might agree that there is an element of wise management here with all those people standing around. Jesus told the disciples to get them all seated, because He was going to feed them decently and in order.

I think that if we look at what was going on in the hearts and lives of those disciples, this was fundamentally flat out obedience to the command of the One who is on the throne. We look at the text and see that this is a lesson in trusting Christ to the point of obedience.

Jesus told His disciples to go do the exact opposite of what they wanted to do. Their intuition was to send them all away. Jesus told them no, and to get the crowd organized. The disciples had to go and set the table, and this was before Jesus even told them what was coming next.

After Jesus told them to do this, the disciples had to muster the energy to follow His command. They had to go out and take charge and get the crowd organized. What did they do? They did it. They did what Jesus told them to do. This is a lesson for all of us who are in Christ. We must ask the Lord to help us understand His Word because it is the authority.

So often the Bible teaches that our thinking and hearts and desires are all infected with sin. Our thoughts will lead us all over the place. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us about our hearts when it says that they are deceitful; don't trust them.

As Christian people what we need to do is ask ourselves what the command of Jesus is. What is the Word telling us? What is the picture found in Scripture of how the world works telling us? We need to be diligent in the different situations of life, especially as we represent Him asking Him to help us be clear on what His Word teaches, what His command is, and what His call is.

I think that is an application that we can draw from seeing how the disciples did what Jesus told them to do, even when it was rubbing against what their thinking was. That is faithful obedience. Jesus is Lord, and we are not! Boy-o-boy, are we living in an age that speaks of the autonomy of the self where each individual person is on the throne of their lives.

Jesus is the Lord and He is the King and He is good. There is a way that seems right to a man but in the end, it leads to death. Jesus is the One who came to experience death for

us. We need to keep our eyes on Jesus asking Him to give us ears to hear and hearts to receive. Then we must good and be diligent students of the Scripture, the Living Word of God.

Finally, we get into the last lesson that is given to us here in this text. What we learn is the lesson of:

4. Divine Provision

We see this lesson of God's blessing as we see what happened next. There were 15,000 plus people scattered over the hills of Eastern Galilee. They must have looked like a patchwork quilt sitting across the landscape.

They were seated and waiting, wondering what was going to happen next. Then we read of it in Verses 16 and 17:

¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

What is the meaning of that word *all*? It means every last one of them. Nobody was left out. There were twelve baskets of broken pieces left over. How many disciples? Twelve! The Lord will take care of the ones who serve Him too.

By the way, when it says broken pieces, I don't think that means that He was giving the disciples scrapes that were left over that everybody had handled. No, it says that Jesus had broken every portion in His own hands.

I think that these people got saturated and full. I wonder if any of you have ever uttered these words: I can't eat another bite! They were full. They were satisfied. It was not like Jesus gave each one a little sample portion like you get at Costco or Sam's Club. No, everybody got to eat as much as they could eat.

That word *satisfy* that is used here is *chortazo* in the Greek. It means to feed, to fatten, to fill up, to satisfy, to cause one to eat to one's fill. That word is also used for foddering the animals. How can we put this in the vernacular? They got their grub on.

I don't know exactly how this miracle took place, if the food was in His hands or under His hands in the basket, but you have to imagine that when Jesus, the pure and Holy One, passed out that food it was perfect and unblemished.

Think about the food in this cursed and fallen world. It is still pretty good. There are lots of good food but imagine the food that Jesus passed out. I'm thinking that those biscuits were about as good as biscuits could be. The fish was properly prepared.

Someone said that the sound of husbands could be heard asking their wives, *Why don't we ever have biscuits like this?* But that is conjecture and not actually in the text. Jesus passed the food out and the people were satisfied, even the disciples had carryout packages to take with them.

This passage of Scripture shows the presence of the Messiah in a potent way, teaching and showing what is going to happen when the consummation of His Kingdom comes. Every disease will be totally, totally put away. There will be no hunger. When Jesus comes back, it is going to be a perfect situation for evermore.

Now we have these breakthroughs and Jesus is here still providing that satisfaction of soul to those who are attached to Him. Now, there are also dark nights of the soul. There are very, very difficult seasons of life. I am very mindful of that. I have experienced some of that.

However, Jesus wants to keep coming back with His grace, love, and with His truth to fill up the cups of His people. He wants to satisfy our souls. That is His eternal plan for His people. That is something that we must see. So, in this world let's just see what Jesus does.

Jesus gives to His people who, in turn, gives to other people. This was not a bucket brigade. It was not quite like that, it was Jesus giving to His disciples and His disciples giving to others. We can go with the testimony—hey, I'm a blind and hungry beggar who found something to eat. Jesus is the One who provided it.

In the same way that He used the disciples in this way, He wants to use us to spread His truth and His love. I pray that He will give us discernment and wisdom and knowledge on how to portion these things out in the different environments that we find ourselves in. We want to go forth in the name of the good and gracious powerful Savior, Jesus, who wants to work through people like you and me.

Jesus can work however He wants, but when the principals of gracious hospitality, personal involvement, and obedient faith were being carried out by His disciples, that is when the Lord's divine provision began.

Likewise, when we are giving ourselves to people, living in a sacrificial way, getting involved and being faithful to what the Lord calls to us to do, that is when He begins doing things in us and through us that are so very powerful.

We must be people who walk by faith. I pray that Jesus will help us to be those who do so. I also pray that your hearts have been ministered to through anything that is true that has come out of my mouth in accordance with this Book, because this is truth and we need to rest in it.

Let's close in a word of prayer.

