

He Fed The People

As we begin our message today, may I say again, as I have said so often before, that these precious words of scripture given to us here are so very special and so very revealing about who Jesus really is. And we need always to read them carefully and to allow the Holy Spirit the opportunity to fully explain them to our spirit. And as often as we do that, we will be blessed beyond measure at the treasures we will discover within them.

Here in today's passage, we'll see that Jesus has carefully orchestrated a circumstance that will demonstrate beyond any question that He, the Lord Jesus, is exactly who He tells us He is. In these few words, He clearly reveals that He is God and Lord over all creation, able to do just as He did in the very beginning, to simply speak and something will be created out of nothing. And He does it with the ease of a Master and Lord.

Read along with me as I read these words in Luke chapter 9, beginning in verse 10.

¹⁰And 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. ¹¹But 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. ¹²When 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."

¹³But 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." ¹⁴For there were about five thousand men.

Then He said to His disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of fifty." ¹⁵And they did so, and made them all sit down.

¹⁶Then 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. ¹⁷So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them. (Luke 9:10-17)

Before we begin our consideration of these precious words about one of the greatest miracles of all time, the feeding of many thousands of people with only a few loaves of bread and two fish, I'd like for us to first consider this beginning verse given here about the Apostles returning from their missionary journey and reporting to Jesus all that they had done.

You'll recall that just a short time earlier, Jesus had sent His disciples out on their first missionary journey throughout the local towns and villages and countryside, preaching and teaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God to anyone who would listen. And now they were returning to report to Jesus about their efforts.

And I would like for us to give some thought to the fact that on this occasion, Jesus' twelve disciples are here in these words called "Apostles". And I'd like for us to understand that there really is a difference, very important difference, between being a disciple and being an Apostle.

By this time in Jesus' ministry, He had many people following after Him who could be described as being disciples. And even today, you and I who follow after the Lord Jesus and believe in Him are also spoken of as being His disciples. But here, we are being clearly shown that while an Apostle may be a disciple, not all disciples are Apostles. And you and I need to know that there really is a difference and what that difference is.

For me, the simplest explanation of the difference between a "Disciple" and an "Apostle" is that an "Apostle" has been given additional special "Spiritual Gifts" from God than those gifts that are given to other "Disciples".

The word "Apostle" means messenger, a "sent one", a person equipped and sent directly by God to carry "special truths" to other people. And while, as the "Great Commission" tells us, all disciples are sent forth to preach the gospel to all nations, we can clearly see from other portions of scripture, that "Apostles" were different. They were "equipped" with powers and abilities that we ordinary disciples do not have.

One of those special powers and abilities given to Apostles is the Spiritual Gift of giving "new words of truth", "new revelations" from God, words that had not been given before.

Let me say all this again. A “disciple” of the Lord Jesus, you and I, can only speak the truths that have already been given to us through these scriptures, nothing more. God does not give us any “new” “words of truth” from Him. The words already given within the pages of these scriptures are the only real truths that now exist. And the words that I share with you each Sunday are only those truths that have already been given in these scriptures.

Why is this so important for you and me to understand and to accept. Listen to these words of warning given in 2 Peter 2,

¹ . . . there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. (2 Peter 2:1-3)

Folks, more than ever before, the words being preached from many of the pulpits across our nation today are not the true words of God. It is so vital to your eternal future that you know that the words you are hearing and accepting are the truths that come out from the pages of this bible. Please, please examine everything that you hear carefully.

If the words that you are hearing are not directly from these scriptures or at least are solidly based on the foundational truths of these scriptures, then please do not accept the things that are being said.

Jesus' disciples were true “Apostles”, able to give new truths and new revelations from God. But I am convinced, both from these scriptures and by the Holy Spirit that no “new words from God” and no new interpretations are being given from God today, and that we must flee from those false teachers who would have us to believe differently.

Now, with all of that being said, let's return to these words before us today in this passage. Here, although no doubt the disciples were excited to tell the Lord Jesus all about the things that they had done, as seemed always to be the case in Jesus' ministry, there was very little time available to rejoice over past experiences. Because as Jesus and His disciples attempted to steal away to a quieter place, the crowds quickly gathered, seeking help for all their needs. And Jesus being the generous, loving God that He is, received the people graciously and ministered to them.

Then, as evening began to draw near, we are given the wonderful privilege of seeing a special part of God's plan beginning to unfold.

Remember folks, nothing in God's providential realm is happenstance. The traveling out into a deserted place where no provision of food would be available to them was clearly by God's plan.

And it was also clearly in God's providential plan that a question would arise in the minds of the disciples about the need for food, bringing them to the circumstance they were in. What were they to do?

The first thing that took place was logical reasoning, "send the people away into the local towns to find food." Logical thought is usually a very good thing. And we need it.

But we need to also keep in mind that logical thought is not an end-all to every situation and every need. Often, God has a different plan, and perhaps even a far greater provision available to us than the one provided to us through our logical thinking. And that is where our "faith" must enter into the equation.

And let me add, faith must become a regular part of every Christian's logical manner of thinking, to by faith, remember that God is always at work with a perfect plan for every situation in our path. In other words, part of our logical reasoning should include asking God about His plans for the circumstances we have in front of us.

These disciples were still very new at the discipline of faith, so Jesus took the time to allow their logical thinking to work its way through its process. And using the logical reasoning of their minds, they determined that they had neither the food, nor the money necessary to feed such a large crowd. So, their logical conclusion was to send the people away into the local towns to find their food.

The stage was then fully set for Jesus to carry out His plan, and His plan began with a special "test" instruction to His disciples. He said to them in Verse 13,

¹³ . . . "You give them something to eat." (Luke 9:13)

What could that instruction be about? Jesus knew that His disciples did not have the food to feed such a large crowd. So then, what was the point of His instruction to them?

Remember folks, these words of scripture have far deeper meanings than is first understood with our human intellect. I would suggest that His instruction was to put within their minds special memories that would guide and encourage them as they carried His ministry forward in future years.

Later on, after Jesus would endure the sufferings of the cross and be resurrected, He would meet with these same men on a beach while they were fishing, and there He would give Peter and His other disciples a similar sounding instruction. He would say to Peter, "Feed My sheep".

These words that we read here today in our text were a very important prelude to those later instructions there on that beach.

Jesus wanted those men then, and you and me now, to know that none of us, of ourselves, ever have the adequate or appropriate food to feed His sheep. Those disciples then and we now need to understand that it is Jesus and Jesus alone who has the "Bread of Life" that people need to nourish and sustain their life.

Yes, this was "physical food" being discussed here, but the allegory is strong and to the point. Jesus instructed His disciples to give these people food that they obviously did not have.

Hidden within His command was the intention of convincing the disciples to know that they, of themselves, would never have the appropriate food to set before people.

And you and I, like these disciples, must always know that we truly will not ever, of ourselves, have the necessary provisions, the right words, the Godly advice, the comforting counsel to set before those who come to us each day. Only Jesus has the true Bread of Life.

Here in this passage, the disciples were easily able to understand that they did not have the wherewithal to feed such a great crowd of people. But such a conclusion will not always be so simple or easy. And we must be very careful in

the kind of “food” that we hand out. It might still leave our friends hungry and wanting.

Thankfully, these disciples were able to come to the right decision for this dilemma. Just as they did earlier when they were about to drown in that great storm on the Sea of Galilee, they immediately turned to Jesus for His answer to their dilemma. And by doing that, they allowed Him the opportunity to carry out another great miracle, this time, one of the greatest miracles He would perform during His earthly ministry. With only five loaves of bread and two small fishes, He would produce enough food to feed a great crowd of people.

In this same account given in the Book of Matthew, we are told that there was not only 5000 or so men present that day, there were also women and children with them, making the total number fed by Jesus to be many, many thousands more.

It was truly a great miracle, one that is spoken about over and over again to give encouragement to us in our times of need. But folks, in reality this miracle was somewhat meager as compared to the miracle that Jesus performed centuries earlier in the desert as He fed hundreds of thousands, even millions of Israelites as they wandered around for forty years.

There in the desert, God brought Manna down from heaven and sent quail to feed the multitudes of Israelites with all of the food they would need for each new day for forty years.

But even that is no great feat for a God so powerful that He could and did at the beginning of time, simply by the power of the word of His mouth, speak all the worlds into existence, creating out of nothing all the things we know about today.

But I also want us to note in this miracle of the feeding of the 5000, that there is a curious difference when compared to the feeding of the Israelites during their days of wandering. And that difference prompts within my heart and mind a moment of imagination, an imagination that is not within these scriptures, and it cannot be preached as being part of these true words of God. But is nonetheless in keeping with the nature of our Generous and Loving God.

My imagination thought is this . . . that as those Old Testament Israelites gathered the Manna and the quail each day, there was to be nothing left over and no extras taken by the people. But curiously, here with the feeding of the 5000, there is special intentional mention that twelve baskets full of bread and fishes were gathered up after everyone had eaten.

And this special difference is an important message to you and me and to anyone who is willing to give of their personal provisions for the benefit of others.

In the Book of John, we are told that those loaves of bread and two fishes belonged to a small boy. And obviously, he had been willing to share his food with others.

Generosity, such as this is spoken about by the Apostle Paul in his thanksgiving to the Philippians for their willingness to share their provisions with others. In Philippians 4:19, the Apostle Paul told those generous people that because they were willing to give, God would, in turn be generous to them, saying that

19 . . . my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

Those are words that are specially given to all who are willing to share their provisions with others who are in need. And the underlying promise is that even greater rewards will be returned to the givers for their selfless generosity.

And while these scriptures do not tell us specifically so, my imagination tells me that in response to the boy's generosity, Jesus might have rewarded him with returning twelve baskets full of loaves and fishes. Can you imagine the joy of it all when he showed his momma the great reward he had received?

But again, that will always be so as we respond generously to Jesus. The promise in Hebrews 11, that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek after Him is an absolute and unfailing truth.

And God will surely reward you and me for our generosity. We need always to remember that all of the good and perfect things of life come down from God and He has an endless supply of them. You and I must never simply take God's grace and hold onto it for our own benefit. We must allow all that He gives to us to freely pass through our hands and to flow on out to the benefit and blessing of anyone and everyone who needs it.

One last thought before we close for today. Note here that Jesus did not concern Himself with whether these people were Jew or Gentile, or of any of the other hindrances that often enter your and my mind as we minister.

No doubt, we also ought not to be concerned about such matters. We ought to instead be as Jesus is, generous and loving and giving. Doing that will allow our hearts and minds the freedom to truly minister.

Folks, all of the miracles that Jesus carried out while here on the earth were special and intended to convey many thoughts and beliefs to us, the most important of which is that He truly is who He says He is. He is Christ, the Son of the Living God, the one who has come to save us from our sins.

He is able to deliver us from any and all of the circumstances of this life, whether those circumstances be hunger or they be sin, He is able to deliver us.

Feeding 5000 people is quite a big undertaking. But even greater than that is the saving of the souls of billions of people. And while that is something that only God can do, we must know that He is asking you and me to join with Him in that undertaking, to “feed His sheep” with the “food” He gives to us within these scriptures.

I'll close with this doxology from 1 Timothy 1,

17Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17)

Let's pray.