

Jesus Welcomed and Fed 5000

Luke 9:10-17

Key Verse: 9:16

“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.”

Recently we studied in 2 Kings that the prophet Elisha fed 100 men with 20 loaves of bread (2Ki 4:42-44). It was a miracle to feed every five men with one loaf of bread. In Luke’s passage here, Jesus feeds over 5000 people with only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, that is, one loaf per thousand men, a miracle 200 times more powerful than Elisha’s. Jesus’ miracle of feeding over 5000 with just 5 loaves and 2 fish is included in all four gospels as perhaps the most well-known miracle of Jesus. In the movie, “Captain Courageous” the fisherman played by Spencer Tracy says of Jesus, “He makes more fish, he makes more bread, he makes more wine. Oh, the Savior, I think he’s the best fisherman, but my father he comes next.” Let’s listen and learn of Jesus through this Bible passage to learn the mind and heart of Christ.

I. Jesus welcomed them all (9:10-11)

In the previous passage, Jesus sent out his twelve disciples to preach and to heal with his power and authority. Verse 6 tells us that they preached and healed people everywhere they went. Verse 10 tells us that they returned to Jesus and reported what they had done. They were now truly apostles, who had been sent out. They must have reported to Jesus with excitement how the power of Jesus had worked through them as they preached and healed others. The mighty, life-giving work of God took place in them, among them and through them.

After hearing their reports, Jesus took the apostles with him and withdrew to the town Bethsaida. In Mark 6:31 Jesus tells us why he did this. He said, **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”** Jesus wanted to give his disciples time to rest and reflect. So they “withdrew” by themselves. They pulled back from the spiritual battle front of active duty. A military synonym for withdraw is “retreat.” Jesus sometimes directs us to retreat in order to regroup, restore and prepare and plan for more spiritual battle. In the Christian community we also use this word “retreat” to refer to Bible conferences in God’s word and

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prayer. Right now our ministry is amidst nine weeks of UBF Director conferences intended to help them to renew, recharge and reflect on their mission. May God bless them and their ministries through this united time of Bible study, fellowship and prayer. May God also bless all of our upcoming Easter/Spring retreats, even as we pray and prepare them.

However, the time of rest and retreat was short-lived for the disciples. Look at verse 11. It says, **“...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.”** The crowds were so enthusiastic to follow Jesus wherever he went. As we know, celebrities are greatly annoyed by overzealous fans and photographers. So the celebrities often wear hats and sunglasses to avoid being recognized in public. But Jesus did not put on a hat and sunglasses to hide.

The Bible says, **“[Jesus] welcomed them...”** What a beautiful word is the word “welcome.” In front of my house I have a doormat that says in capital letters, “WELCOME.” Maybe many of you also have a welcome mat or sign. However, I must admit, it is one thing to have a welcome mat and another thing entirely to have a welcoming heart, especially when my schedule is interrupted. As we all know so well, the average American is busy, busy, busy. We just don’t seem to have enough hours on any given day to do all the things that we need to get done, not to mention that we want to get done. And this is still true even though we have so many machines and gadgets to make life simpler and tasks easier, like washers and dryers, phones, food markets, cars, buses, airplanes, and the internet. Of course, sometimes these things can be great time-wasters because we have to repair them or because we get distracted by them.

Jesus had a plan for quiet time with his disciples. But when the crowds crashed his retreat (without even registering for it!) Jesus did not say, “Go away,” nor did he say to his disciples, “Let’s run away!” The Bible says, **“Jesus welcomed them...”** Jesus’ heart was broad, like the ocean, ready to embrace not just one or two needy people, but a crowd of 5000 unexpected guests. Suppose 10 people suddenly showed up some evening where you are staying and wanted to ask you questions and share their problems with you. Would you be ready and willing to welcome them? How about if they were also hungry and tired? Could you still

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welcome them? Who can welcome people as Jesus did? Jesus is truly our Good Shepherd.

Jesus was not narrow or fixed in his plan. Jesus was flexible, ever ready to change his schedule. Actually, Jesus regarded their visiting not as an imposition, but as a divine appointment in God's schedule book. I like to keep a daily schedule book to help me to stay on task. So when something unexpected comes up that needs to be dealt with, it's easy to get frustrated. For those of you who have cell phones, how many times have you decided to miss the call, even though you had time to answer it? I say this because as a nation we really have to overcome our self-centered, individualistic lifestyle. Jesus was not self-centered and individualistic and Jesus taught his disciples that they must overcome such a lifestyle.

So what did Jesus do with this crowd? The Bible mentions two ways that Jesus immediately served them: first, he spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and second, he healed those who needed healing. It was Jesus' two-fold ministry of preaching and healing. Jesus always gave people the message of the kingdom of God. To some people, the message of the kingdom of God sounds impractical, unuseful and irrelevant, and they don't think it's important to make time for Bible reading and prayer. They would much rather talk about sports or politics or the economy. Many would rather read the newspaper or internet articles instead of the Bible.

To Jesus, all people need the message of the kingdom of God, even if it looks like they need a job or a sandwich. Why is the kingdom of God so important, even though we cannot experience it with our physical senses of seeing and hearing? What is the kingdom of God and why is it more important than food or money or human recognition? The kingdom of God is the realm and reality of God. Isaiah 6 shows us that God is living and active, whether we see and know this or not. When we see God on his throne, surrounded by angels, our whole way of thinking and living is sanctified. Our lives take on eternal meaning and purpose. We escape an empty way of life that is focused on ourselves. With God's rule in one's mind and heart and soul, all fear and meaninglessness is taken away. One

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who accepts the message of the kingdom of God receives true love, peace and joy of living. These days there are so many depressed people. Why are so many people depressed? More importantly, how can people be freed from oppressive and depressing moods and thoughts? I am not a professional psychologist, but I have observed and experienced that the word of God can set people free from depression. Psalms 42 and 43 express the liberation of a depressed person: **“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”**

What we speak about shows what is in our hearts - our true joy and passion. Jesus’ joy and passion was the kingdom of God. So he spoke about it all the time. What is your joy and passion? What do you love to talk about: your favorite hobby? a movie or TV show? Do you love to talk about the kingdom of God? One way to help us to do this is to schedule Bible study and prayer time with someone, either a believer, or with someone who does not yet have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. May God purify our hearts and our mouths so we may speak about his kingdom and not so much about trivial or unimportant things.

Jesus also healed all who needed healing. Jesus helped people practically with their life problems. Jesus didn’t just speak to them about God’s kingdom and then say, “Bye-bye. Take care of yourself.” Jesus helped people with their life problems and difficulties. Are you helping someone practically with a life problem? To do so could be your best training to learn the shepherd mind and life of Christ.

II. Jesus fed them all (12-17)

Jesus gave the crowds of people his full attention. It seemed that the retreat time with his disciples was not going to happen. Look at verse 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.’”** It was late in the afternoon. That means the day was almost over and it was getting dark. Keep in mind that there was no electricity in Jesus’ time, so when it got dark, the primary means of seeing what you were doing was the moon, the stars and oil lamps. So people tried to work when there was sunlight and retire to their homes for the day when it got dark. The

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disciples actually had a very reasonable and mindful suggestion: since they were far from town, the people needed time to go and find food and shelter. It appears that the disciples waited quietly while Jesus ministered to the crowds. But they did notice the sun sinking lower on the horizon. Since Jesus was so intensively engrossed in his ministry to the crowds, the disciples thought they would help Jesus out with a suggestion: **“Send the crowd away...”** And even though they didn’t say it, it’s a sure thing that the disciples were also hungry and tired.

The abrupt turning point of this event is Jesus’ shocking reply to his disciples. Look at verse 13. [Jesus] replied, **“You give them something to eat.”** The disciples had just said, **“Send the crowd away.”** Jesus said, **“You give them something to eat.”** The disciples thought that the crowd had to solve their own problem of food and lodging. Jesus did not agree. Of course the disciples had food and shelter problems of their own. Why did Jesus tell them, **“You give them something to eat”**? What can we learn through this?

In the first place, Jesus wants us to do something. The disciples said, “they.” Jesus said, “you.” Jesus wanted them to take responsibility and do something for the crowd. Actually, Jesus had already done so much for this crowd, teaching them until the sun went down and healing all who needed healing. Jesus’ disciples were his students. They were in Kingdom University, Jesus was their Professor and Advisor, and they were studying for a BLJ degree (Be Like Jesus). Jesus did not want his disciples to be spectators forever. He had already sent them out to preach and to heal. Now he is continuing their spiritual education and formation. Jesus was including them in ministering to this huge crowd. That meant each disciple had to help and serve about 500 people. There are many spiritually needy and hungry people in the world. Jesus wants to feed them all and he wants us to participate. If you don’t help and feed them who will? Christians who don’t serve and help others as a way of life are doing a great disservice to the kingdom of God. On the other hand, those who do something for others in Jesus’ name grow in Jesus’ image as Jesus’ disciples and they are happy and blessed.

In the second place, Jesus wants us to have a giving spirit. Jesus gave and gave and gave until he gave his life. If we do not give to others then we cannot say that we really know Jesus. Paul learned from Jesus, **“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”** (Ac 20:35) Naturally, we are skilled and fixated on getting

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something, rather than giving. All children need to be taught to give and to share, since one of their first words is “mine.” Not only children, but in our society we automatically look out for ourselves and our families first, and then, if we think we have anything left over, we might consider helping others. Jesus promised in Luke 6:38, **“Give and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”** 2 Corinthians 9:6 says, **“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”**

In our ministry, one of our spiritual legacies is a ‘giving spirit.’ One time Mother Barry suggested to Dr. Samuel Lee that poor Korean students pay for some publishing project. Dr. Lee thought it was unreasonable and disagreed with her. But after struggling with it in light of God’s word, he had to agree with her: God gave his Son. Jesus gave his life. Jesus taught his disciples to give. Dr. Lee realized that his people were like lepers or beggars, who only knew how to receive, not to give. He decided to learn a giving spirit and said, “Let’s stretch out our leper-like, shrunken fingers and give to others so that the tide of God’s blessings may turn toward Korea.” Korean UBF students began to practice a sacrificial giving spirit. Students saved their bus fare to donate for world mission. Someone pawned his own watch. Another donated blood at the blood bank. Indeed, Jesus blesses those who give and he blesses others through them.

In the third place, give even what little we have to Jesus. The disciples must have been stunned by Jesus’ command: **“You give them something to eat.”** They must’ve said in their minds, “What? That’s crazy! That’s impossible!” I’m just guessing what they thought. The Bible tells us what they said. Look at verse 13b. **“They answered, ‘We have only five loaves of bread and two fish - unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.’”** Actually, the disciples did well to look and find something, rather than complaining about Jesus’ impossible command. They found something, though it was small: 5 loaves and 2 fish. They didn’t reply, “Our pockets are empty.” They even suggested another option: to buy food for all the crowd. Perhaps one of the disciples knew a rich relative in the crowd who could make a big donation for a meal.

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When we see the world, even our neighbors, the spiritual condition looks too difficult to change for the better. We can wonder: “Can I really make a difference?” We feel like a drop of water before a forest fire. Actually we cannot do much. But Jesus can. Jesus didn’t expect his disciples to come up with 5000 fish sandwiches. Jesus just wanted them to give whatever they had. Then he would bless it and use it to bless others. Jesus wanted them to start with what they had, not with what they didn’t have. A wise person once said, “It’s better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” Sometimes we think that we have nothing to give to Jesus or what I have is too small to make a difference. Still, everyone has something to give to Jesus that he will bless to reach and bless others. One person gives her friend-making ability to bring others to Jesus. Another gives her artistic ability for Christian publications. Another gives money to support gospel workers. Someone gives Saturdays to teach the Bible to children. Someone gives an open door to serve visitors any time. One woman gave up her dream of marriage to serve Christ. Another gave up his dream for a PhD. God has taken what they gave and has blessed thousands to come to Christ. Our one to one Bible studies look small. But God has blessed our one to one Bible studies to lead many to Christ and to raise many missionaries all over the world. I gave up my yuppie dream in order to serve Christ full time. I can honestly say that I have no regrets. But sometimes I wonder if my life is really making a difference. Then I remember Jesus’ promise in Mark 10:30 that anyone who has left any worldly attachment for him and for the gospel will not fail to receive 100 times as much in this life, plus eternal life. What have you given to Jesus? Whatever you give to Jesus, he will bless and use to reach and bless others.

After the disciples mentioned the 5 loaves and the 2 fish and the option to buy food, Jesus had another command for them: **“Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.”** The disciples started off saying, **“Send them away.”** Now Jesus tells them, **“Have them sit down.”** It meant, “Let them stay a while longer. You get them into groups of 50.” So each disciple had to manage and serve about 10 groups of 50 people. That’s not an easy job! In this way, Jesus wanted to include them in his work. Verse 15 says, **“The disciples did so, and everybody sat down.”** Jesus prepared an environment of faith. His disciples simply obeyed his instructions. They did not question or argue with Jesus. When the disciples followed Jesus’ orders, the people followed their directions. Spiritual authority and

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influence comes from following Jesus' instructions, as we also learned in the previous passage and many other Bible passages.

Finally, Jesus took the 5 loaves and the 2 fish. Looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people. Jesus taught them and us to thank God for our food and for all his provisions. Verse 17 describes the miracle that took place. **“They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.”** Jesus is the Maker and Supplier. His disciples were the servers and distributors. All the people ate to their fill. Here we can see that Jesus fully satisfies all who come to him.

This event shows us that Jesus does not drive away anyone who comes to him for help. Jesus is our Shepherd and Provider. The disciples started with just 5 loaves of bread among them and they each ended up with a basketful. The blessing of God overflowed to them. Not only that, they participated with Jesus in feeding the whole crowd of over 5000. Jesus blesses whatever we give him. We only have to give something to him in faith. Then Jesus will multiply it to bless others. Jesus' blessing flows to those who give to him and to others through them. We all want to be blessed and a blessing, don't we? Of course we all want peace, joy and meaning of life. Then how can we be blessed and a blessing? It is by growing in the mind and heart of Jesus. May God help us as disciples of Jesus to grow in the welcoming heart of Jesus and to give something to Jesus for his blessing on others and on us. Amen.