

YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT

Luke 9:10-17

Key Verse: 9:13a

“He replied, ‘You give them something to eat.’”

In the last passage Jesus sent his disciples out for fieldwork training. He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases. Then he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. When they obeyed Jesus and went out, God worked mightily through them and many were touched by the love of God. We must depend only on Jesus in doing gospel work. We must preach the message of the kingdom of God as of first importance.

In today’s passage Jesus feeds five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. This event is recorded in all four gospel books. It is the climax of Jesus’ Galilean ministry. Jesus reveals himself as the God of compassion and the God of blessing. Moreover, he trains his disciples to be shepherds like him. May God help us listen to Jesus’ words and grow as shepherds through this study.

First, Jesus welcomed them (10-11).

Look at verse 10a. “When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done.” Here they are called “apostles.” “Apostle” means “one who is sent.” After giving them power and authority, Jesus sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. The disciples did so. As they return to Jesus and report what they had done, Luke calls them “apostles.” It was a kind of promotion. Those who receive fieldwork training well can be promoted. They can experience the joy of growing spiritually in Jesus and the joy of pleasing Jesus. But one who resists training can become a cautionary tale.

The apostles must have had a very beautiful and interesting report meeting. Maybe Peter stepped forward and said, “A mute girl came to me. I put my hand on her head and said, ‘In the name of Jesus, be healed.’ Then she opened her mouth and began to speak. Not only did she speak, she sang the most beautiful hymn of praise.” Not to be outdone, James said, “Well, while I was preaching, a demon-possessed man was there. He was so troublesome that his own parents did not want to see him anymore. So I said, ‘In the name of Jesus, I command you to come out of him.’ The demon shrieked and came out. The man has followed me ever since. He is standing right over there. See!” To everyone’s surprise Bartholomew, who had not spoken for six months, stepped forward and said, “A prominent village leader was bitten by a poisonous snake. He was in critical condition. So I put my hand on him and said, ‘In the name of Jesus, be healed.’ And immediately he was cured.” When the apostles depended on Jesus and preached the kingdom of God there was a great work of God through them. Maybe their report meeting kept going on and on. They were very excited about the work of God done through them. They felt that they were ready to go out and conquer the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus must have been greatly encouraged by the reports of the Twelve. Now they were doing the same work that Jesus had been doing. But Jesus also knew that his disciples still had a long way to go. Their inner men needed transformation by the gospel. Their lifestyles were not really gospel-centered. Though they had the energy that comes from an exciting new experience, they needed spiritual rest after their evangelistic journey. Most importantly, it was time to begin teaching them the meaning of Jesus’ death and resurrection. So Jesus took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. There, Jesus wanted to have a retreat with his disciples. Something hindered the plan.

Look at verse 11a. “...but the crowds learned about it and followed him.” When Jesus withdrew from the crowds, they sensed it immediately. They didn’t want to be separated from Jesus even for a few hours. They were as sensitive to Jesus’ presence with them as a newborn baby is to his mother’s. Without delay, they followed him to the place where he was going. What did Jesus do? Look at verse 11b. “He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.” We learn much about Jesus in this short verse.

First of all, Jesus welcomed them. They were not rich and famous or the elite of society or the well-educated. They were just ordinary people who needed help in many ways. There were five thousand men—more than ten times the size of our Sunday worship service. They came without an appointment at a time when Jesus planned to have a

retreat with his disciples. Yet, Jesus welcomed them. We can imagine that Jesus broke into a big smile and gladness filled his heart to see this crowd of people coming to him. Jesus wanted to embrace them one by one and teach them the word of God and heal their sicknesses. Jesus wanted to restore the image of God in them and lead them back to the glorious kingdom of God. Jesus is like the father in the parable of the prodigal son who saw his repentant son coming from far away, ran to meet him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him. Jesus is the God of compassion who welcomes anybody and everybody who comes to him. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

On the other hand, sinful human beings are basically selfish. It is hard for us to welcome even one person who comes without an appointment. One young shepherd family has been blessed abundantly in every way. So they must be a blessing. But they never invite their sheep to their home. They have never invited the elders to their home. The mat in front of their door says, "Welcome." But their hearts say, "Do not enter." This is fallen man's mentality. Fallen men are all selfish. But Jesus is the God of compassion who can welcome five thousand uninvited needy people with affection and joy.

Once, on a Saturday afternoon, Dr. Samuel Lee was working hard on his Sunday message. Suddenly, a tall man came into his room and sat down without saying anything. Looking up from message preparation, Dr. Lee began to talk to him to figure out why he came. Finally he said he had a marriage problem. So Dr. Lee asked how he would support his wife after marriage. Then he said, "I did not think about that." Dr. Lee took time to listen to this man and understand him in the midst of preparing the Sunday message. When we have the compassion of Jesus in our hearts, we can welcome God's precious children anytime with a joyful mind.

Look at verse 11 again. Jesus spoke to them about the kingdom of God. This crowd of people seemed to need many things. But Jesus helped them in the most important way by telling them about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the solution to the root problem of all mankind. The kingdom of God comes when we accept Jesus in our hearts. Jesus rules our hearts with peace and love. Jesus drives out evil spirits, forgives our sins, purifies us from all unrighteousness, and gives us eternal life and the living hope in the kingdom of God.

Jesus also healed those who needed healing. Jesus' care for the crowd of people was practical. He touched the problems that made their lives miserable and healed them. In this first part, we learn that Jesus' compassion is higher than the mountains and deeper than the oceans. May God help each of us to have the compassion of Jesus in our hearts.

Second, you give them something to eat (12-13a).

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 now late in the afternoon. The western horizon was turning from red to dusky purple. The Twelve had been waiting for Jesus to finish. But each time they thought he was done, Jesus took a fresh breath and began preaching the kingdom of God all over again. While Jesus was winning people over to God one by one, the disciples were feeling more and more burdened. Heaven was rejoicing, but the disciples began to grumble. At last, the disciples could endure no longer. They came to Jesus and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging." The disciples are forever guilty of saying these words, "Send the crowd away." We understand them very well. We also want to say, "Send the crowd away," when we reach our human limitations. What did Jesus say? Look at verse 13a. "He replied, 'You give them something to eat.'" Jesus did not accept the disciples' idea. He told them, "You give them something to eat." Here we learn several things from Jesus.

In the first place, Jesus wanted his disciples to have a sense of responsibility for the crowd of people. To Jesus, when the disciples said, "Send the crowd away," it was terribly irresponsible. Jesus replied, "You give them something to eat." Jesus wanted them to take care of God's sheep to the end, including feeding them when they were hungry. To Jesus, it was not enough to welcome them, preach the kingdom of God and heal their sicknesses. Jesus wanted to feed them, too. Jesus wanted his disciples to share his sense of responsibility. The words "sense of responsibility" may sound dutiful. But a sense of responsibility comes when we love God. God made man to be the steward of God's world. When we love God, we want to make the whole world beautiful and pleasing to God. God is most concerned about people. So we must take care of people with a sense of responsibility. When Jesus said, "You give them something to eat," it meant we must have a sense of responsibility for the flock of God's sheep.

In the second place, Jesus wanted them to live by faith (13). When Jesus said, "You give them something to eat," he knew that the disciples did not have resources to do so. But Jesus wanted them to feed the crowd of people by faith. This was the point of their fieldwork training: to go out by faith, depending on the power of God. Jesus trained his disciples to live by faith, not by their human abilities. This is basic training for anyone who serves God. God led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the wilderness with a clear vision to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. However, they were imbued with a slave mentality after 400 years of bondage. Whenever they felt the situation was difficult, they complained to Moses and wanted to give up. But God trained them in faith to make them conquerors. When they learned to live by faith, they could conquer the promised land for the glory of God. Faith training is essential for anyone who serves God. For the last 25 years, Chicago UBF fellowship leaders have received faith training from Dr. Samuel Lee, especially at conference registration time. Sometimes, when a leader failed to win a new person to register for the conference, he would have to walk back from the Skokie police station. It was to encourage him to look up to God by faith. This training was not easy at all. But those who received this training with a sincere heart grew to be true spiritual leaders. Now Chicago UBF fellowship leaders are not ordinary men. They are men of faith. Now we believe that each fellowship will grow to have 120 members through their faith.

In the third place, Jesus wanted them to learn a shepherd's heart. Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." Jesus used the word "give." Jesus knew that what they had was very small. But Jesus wanted them to learn the spirit of giving. This spirit of giving comes from the shepherd heart of God. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. A shepherd's heart compels one to give for the sake of others. The disciples had five loaves of bread and two fish. It was small. But it was something. One or two of them might have wanted to take this five loaves and two fish to a secret place to eat it by themselves. But Jesus wanted them to give it to him for the feeding of the five thousand. Likewise, what we have is often small. But Jesus wants us to learn how to give what we have for his sheep. Jesus wants us to learn the shepherd heart of God step by step, by giving what we have.

Third, Jesus and his disciples feed the 5,000 (14b-17).

Look at verse 14b. "But he said to his disciples, 'Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.'" While the disciples were still somewhat dizzy from Jesus' words, "You give them something to eat," Jesus pressed them again to have the people sit down in groups of about fifty each. This time, the disciples did not talk back to Jesus. They simply began to have the people sit down. When they obeyed Jesus' word, they could have spiritual authority to have people sit down. Some school teachers know how difficult it is to have 30 children sit down in the classroom. But the disciples could make five thousand men and many women and children sit down in an orderly manner. In this way, the disciples made a good environment for Jesus to work in. In this way, they coworked with Jesus. Jesus is God. But he did not work all by himself. He coworked with his disciples to feed the 5,000 people.

Look at verse 16a. "Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them." Jesus accepted the five loaves and two fish. Then Jesus looked up to heaven. Jesus thanked God for what he had and believed God's blessing. Then Jesus gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and a miracle happened. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. God's blessing was overflowing. Jesus is the God of blessing. Jesus really wants to bless his people. And he wants to use his disciples as a source of blessing for the whole world.

Now we know clearly what we must do: We must give five loaves and two fish to Jesus by faith. This has been the secret of UBF ministry from the beginning. When Mother Barry went to Korea to serve suffering people, she offered her marriage to God as five loaves and two fish. When Dr. Samuel Lee decided to serve world mission, he offered his whole life to God, including his chance to study for a Ph.D. in America, which he really wanted to do. When Dr. Joseph Chung wanted to offer something for world mission, he had nothing; so he sold his blood to have something to give. Then God blessed UBF ministry abundantly. Now we pray to make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We cannot do this. But God can do this when we give five loaves and two fish to Jesus. There is one young man who has "a beautiful mind;" he is a kind of genius. He must give his beautiful mind to Jesus, not to the devil. There is another young man who has a dynamic speaking voice. He must give his dynamic voice to Jesus, not to the devil. When we bring five loaves and two fish to Jesus, he can bless America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

In this passage we learned the compassionate shepherd heart of Jesus. Most of all we heard Jesus' words, "You give them something to eat." May Jesus grant us a sense of responsibility and a shepherd heart for America. May Jesus help each of us bring five loaves and two fish to him by faith and experience the overflowing blessing of God.