

**Sunday, September 17, 2023 | Everyday Disciple**

**Week 21 | Luke 9:10-17 | "A Feast in the Desert"**

Last week, we finished a two-part message on expanding God's Kingdom. Remarkably, we learned that while Jesus was the sender and instructor, the Apostles were sent to do the work. The Lord commissioned and coached the disciples and Jesus' credibility crew. So much so that Herod the Tetrarch wanted to meet this Jesus. The lesson we gleaned from that passage was how it is God's good pleasure not to call the qualified but to qualify the called. **The Lord works through flawed vessels to expand his kingdom.**

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Today, we come to the *only* miracle recorded in all *four* gospels: the feeding of the five thousand (cf. Mat. 14:13–21; Mar. 6:31–44; Jn. 6:1–14). You won't be surprised to learn that food is essential to life. This is as true today as it was back then. But, unlike today, where convenience stores are on every corner, food didn't come so easy in the first century. There were no grocery stores or fast food joints. And, like the people in our story, should you ever find yourself in a desolate place, food shortage is a severe problem.

However, Luke will demonstrate that any so-called "serious problem" is the purview of the Almighty. Even what we might consider an impossible obstacle is an *opportunity* for God to reveal something extraordinary about himself. But will we have enough faith to persevere despite our circumstances? Will we believe against all odds that, though we may be out of ideas, the Lord already has the solution? Will we obey, though we don't completely understand what's happening? Should you take to heart this story, you will give a resounding "yes" to each of those questions.

The narrative is structured around two things:

**i. The apostles pinpoint a problem (vs. 10-14a).**

**READ:** Luke 9:12-14a (ESV)

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

<sup>12</sup> 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.”<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup> For there were about five thousand men.

The Greek word, translated as "men," refers exclusively to males.<sup>1</sup> This means many more people were there, and it would've numbered far more than 5K. Thus, even the suggestion that they "go and buy food for all these people" is not a sincere suggestion but one given in hopelessness. They're best solution was no solution at all. The disciples were clearly overwhelmed by the need before them.<sup>2</sup>

Life often presents us with problems that overwhelm us.

**ii. Jesus provides a solution (vs. 14b-17).**

**READ:** Luke 9:14b-17 (ESV)

And he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.”<sup>15</sup> And they did so, and had them all sit down.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

There is an OT parallel to this passage in the Exodus story when God provided manna in the wilderness. Thus, Jesus providing food from virtually nothing is a claim to deity. Just as God gave bread to the children of God, God has given his Son as the Bread of Life. And anyone who comes to him and eats of him will have life everlasting (cf. Jn. 6:51). We have just read that Herod asked in 9:9, “who is this about whom I hear such things?” The feeding of the five thousand answers this question (9:20), like the healing of the maniac of Gadara answered the disciples' question after Jesus calmed the sea (cf. Lu. 8:25).

Notice that Jesus did not explain himself. The disciples were to organize the crowds without knowing what would come next. Obedience often precedes understanding. We don't always have to understand to obey. In fact, it is in the doing that God's wisdom is known. Experience

Notice also that the bread the disciples distributed was not provided by their own hand but by Christ's. What good the minister of God has, and whatever help he/she might give, may it be

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards, James R., *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), p. 265.

<sup>2</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 266.

derived from God's word. Jesus asked them to provide food for everyone, and, technically, they...did...just...that as they distributed Jesus' miracle to the crowd. This is why many will say that Jesus' miracles were "acted out parable" because the miracle isn't the point of a miracle; it is what that miracle is trying to say that is the point. Christ performed miracles so that people learned a lesson. In this case, the disciples realized that they did not have enough provision to give to everyone in need, so they must rely upon Jesus to provide for their needs and the needs of others. **Followers of God are mediators of the message, not the makers.** "It is a dependent spirit that Jesus wishes to foster in his disciples."<sup>3</sup>

Faith may, at times, strike us as unreasonable. Jesus challenged the disciples to give the crowds food, which struck them as irrational and/or impossible. They were overwhelmed. But, never forget, faith provides whatever it requires. Whatever God is calling you to do, trust him that he'll provide the means to do it.

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

**Little is much when God is in it.**

Indeed, Jesus could've used only one loaf of bread; he didn't need five. He could've used only one fish; he didn't need two. Truly, truly, he didn't even need the boy's lunch at all; he could've made food from stone (cf. Mat. 4:3). But, herein is a marvelous thing: even though Jesus can do whatever he wants without any assistance from us, he chooses to use what little is given to him and this, effectively, makes us co-laborers with him. How amazing it is to know that God invites us to share in his work and harvest!! That boy went home that day, marveling that Jesus did what he did and that his modest offering was used to feed thousands. Likewise, those disciples went home that day marveling not only what their Master did but that their modest faith was used to help thousands.

That God uses mankind's meager offerings to accomplish great things is a principle found throughout the Scriptures. For instance, though **Abraham and Sarah** were one couple and though they were well beyond the age to have children, they became the patriarch and matriarch of a family that has so many descendants they're "as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore" (Heb. 11:12). Though **Israel** was but a nomadic tribe who had been wondering the wilderness for forty years, they needed nothing but a few **trumpets** to conquer the city of **Jericho** (cf. Josh. 6:20). Though **David** brought 5 stones (cf. 1 Sam. 17:40), he only needed one to take down **Goliath** (cf. 1 Sam. 17:49). Though

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<sup>3</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), p. 836.

**Gideon** led 32,000 soldiers (cf. Judg. 7:3) to face an army four times its size—i.e., 135,000 (Judg. 8:10)—he only needed 300 to take down the **Midianites** (cf. Judg. 7:8). Though **Peter** was one man, the Lord used his preaching on the **Day of Pentecost** to save roughly 3,000 people on the first day and, remarkably, that number later grew by 2,000 (cf. Ac. 2:41; 4:4).

But, do not miss the fact that, though God multiplied the little that these heroes of the faith had, from their perspective, they gave their all. The boy had five loaves and two fish, and he gave five loaves and two fish. Jesus once celebrated a poor widow woman because, though she only gave two mites, she gave all she had (cf. Lu. 21:1-4).

In 1924, nearly 100 years ago, the wife of a traveling evangelist named Kittie Suffield penned the words to the hymn *Little Is Much When God Is In It*. Her song reflects how, rather than become a concert pianist or sing on stage, she headed God's call for her to be in ministry.

### **Little Is Much When God Is In It**

by Kittie Suffield

#### **Verse 1**

In the harvest field now ripened  
There's a work for all to do  
Hark, the voice of God is calling  
To the harvest calling you

#### **Verse 2**

Does the place you're called to labor  
Seem so small and little known  
It is great if God is in it  
And He'll not forget His own

#### **Verse 3**

When the conflict here is ended  
And our race on earth is run  
He will say if we are faithful  
Welcome home, My child. Well done

#### **Verse 4**

When we enter heaven's portals  
And our Savior's face we see  
Cares of life will be forgotten  
We'll be happy, glad, and free

#### **Chorus**

Little is much when God is in it  
Labor not for wealth or fame  
There's a crown, and you can win it  
If you go in Jesus' name

You never know what God could do with what little we have. God did wonders with a few loaves and fishes; what more could he do with an entire life wholly devoted to him?

## Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/GJ4mxMg>