

February 17, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 9:10-17.

1. How would you have responded to the crowd waiting at the shoreline if you were Peter?
2. How do you feel about people who like Jesus kind-of-stuff, religion, and seeking a good feeling, but really do not desire to know Jesus?
3. Was the disciples' suggestion for Jesus to send the crowds away to get food and lodging uncaring?
4. What words in the text highlight the test Jesus gave to the disciples?
5. Jesus knew the apostles could not provide enough food, and surely Jesus knew about the boy with the fish and bread, so why did He present such an impossible situation to the apostles?
6. Why did Jesus bless the bread and fish and what lesson does that teach us?
7. How many people do you think were actually present?

AUTHORITY OVER LIFE'S NECESSITIES Luke 9:10-17

By common assessment, the most immediate necessities of life are food, water, shelter and clothing. Many modern lists emphasize the minimum level of "basic needs" that go beyond just food, water, clothing and shelter, to include sanitation, education, and healthcare. But some lists don't stop there. Many people in modern Western cultures include a cell phone and access to the internet as basic necessities. Can we really not survive without a cell phone or internet service? No doubt some of you might honestly wonder about that. Nevertheless a serious assessment of what we must have in order to survive is probably going to land back at the need for food, water, shelter, and clothing.

Isn't it wonderful to be the object of Christ's love, grace and attention. We should be almost overwhelmed by the truths and evidences about our Lord's authority that we have learned about so far in Luke's account of the Good News. I am humbled to know that God the Son who is the Great Creator loves me. I am amazed that I have the attention of Christ who has the power and the authority to command weather, heal sicknesses of every kind, cast out demons and even raise the dead. How privileged we are to be followers of the greatest teacher who ever lived, the One who teaches with astonishing, divine authority.

It is wonderful to know that He who saves us from the power and penalty of sin has such authority. But in our text today, we learn that the all-powerful, authoritative Son of God is also concerned about our basic necessities of life. When we typically think about providing food and water for ourselves, we conclude that such provision is our responsibility. Let's wait and bother our Lord about the important things like sickness, death, and water in our boat because of the storms of life. We can take care of the basic things.

No. David wrote, "*I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread*" (Psalm 37:25). Jesus's love for us impacts the big problems in life. And Jesus's love for us provides for things we minimize, things we seldom stop to think about. Jesus reminds us how much He cares by providing simple, necessary things like lunch.

In our text is one of the most well known stories from Jesus's ministry. It is one of two miracles that all four Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) record. Here Jesus taught how He has authority over the most basic matters of life. In this story He reminds us that we have the strength, opportunity, and ability to gather together here today to minister to each other and to praise our Savior, because He loves us so much that He exercised all the authority necessary to put us here now.

The Test (vv.10-13a).

A question that sits on the surface at the beginning of this text is, "How will Jesus respond to the unending crowds?"(vv.10-11). First, we learn that the apostles returned with great news. *On their return the apostles told him all that they had done (v.10a)*. The apostles returned from the mission on which Jesus had sent them. We learned about that mission in the first part of chapter nine. *And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal (Luke 9:1-2)*.

No doubt the apostles were bubbling over with stories about how people responded to their proclamation of the good news. Surely they gave accounts of healing and exorcism. Probably they had gathered at Capernaum, maybe at Peter's house. If so, we might wonder if there was a crowd standing around outside waiting for the meeting to end so they could be healed or whatever other needs were represented there.

There is no record in any of the Gospel accounts about a crowd besieging them, but it is clear that the Master and His apostles tried to find some much-needed rest. Jesus's plan was to lead the group of wearied servants who had just "come off the road" to a remote area for some R&R. *And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. (v.10b)*. This event occurred near the end of Jesus's Galilean ministry. It had been ceaseless teaching, healing, confrontation from religious critics, and the press of people for about a year and a half. The days had been so busy that Mark recorded, *For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat (Mark 6:31)*.

Jesus and the apostles were physically exhausted and in need of some rest and recuperation. So they traveled a few miles east to an area connected with the town of Bethsaida. It is possible that there was more than one town named Bethsaida just like there are fifty "Greenvilles" in America, one for each state. The name Bethsaida is a compound name made up of *Beth* which means house, and *saida* which means hunter or fisherman. Therefore, it was commonly known as the fishermen's house. One would expect to find a town with that name located along the seashore. We know that Bethsaida was the hometown of Peter, Andrew, Philip, and probably Nathanael. It seems like that was the area, near the town, where Jesus was headed.

Instead of getting the much-needed rest, Jesus welcomed the persistent crowd. *When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them (v.11a)*. In fact, the crowd was waiting when Jesus and the apostles arrived at their vacation spot. That is clear from Mark's account in which he wrote, *And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things (Mark 6:32-34)*.

It is very likely that the crowd, walking or running on foot, was able to keep Jesus's boat in view. If that was the case, it also means that probably the apostles could see the crowd tracking them as they sailed across the Sea of Galilee. If we were in that situation, we would have been completely frustrated and maybe angry. "What was wrong with these people?" we would have asked. Didn't they understand Jesus needed a break? We would have told the people to go away and wait for a more convenient time.

It is true that many of the people in the crowd longed to hear Jesus teach, while others were sick and needed healing that the doctors of that day could not provide. But a lot of the people were just curiosity seekers, bandwagon riders, surging the popular tide. John told us that *a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick (John 6:2)*. That kind of power will attract a bunch of thrill seekers as well as people who sincerely

desired healing. Some of those people even wanted to make Jesus king on the spot (John 6:15). Jesus rebuked the people for their shallow insincerity (John 6:26-27).

Be that as it may, there they were waiting for Him on the shore before the boat even landed. And I would have said in a very loud and authoritative voice, “Go away!” But Jesus exercised His power and authority with great compassion. He saw the people, welcomed the people, and met the people’s needs. *And spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing (v.11b).*

God the Son did what He came to do. He was talking to them about the kingdom of God. That means He was telling them about God’s standard of righteousness. He helped them see that they were not righteous in themselves. He said things like, *Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).* He must have taught that He is the light of the world, He is the thirst-quenching water of life, He is the bread of life, He is God the Son, Savior from sin. And Jesus cared for the people’s physical need, curing those who needed healing.

An important question arises in our hearts at this point. Does our Savior and Master expect us to live like He did? Yes, He does according to His Word. He told us to, *Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Colossians 3:12).* We are to respond to the needy people like Paul did when he confessed, *For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:8).* Therefore, we are to respond the same way Paul taught the Christians in Rome to respond. *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10).*

Love and compassion for others causes us to take time to talk to needy sinners about our Lord’s provision of salvation. Genuine compassion makes us sacrifice time and energy to bear a brother’s/sister’s burden. The compassion of Christ drives us to counsel and encourage others, to figuratively put an arm around the faltering brother, the failing sister, the hurting saint and pray with them and for them. Though no one can truly know the full effect of sorrow, pain, loss, or sense of failure, the compassion of Christ makes us empathetic.

So how will Jesus meet the most basic needs of the crowd in this (vv.12-13)? It will be a test for the apostles. In fact, the Master’s suggestion to them was the test. His suggestion came as a response to the apostles’ recommendation to Him. *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” (v.12).*

In this part of the story, it is clear that human wisdom recognized limitations. The crowd was in a remote area. There was not a hamburger stand anywhere in sight. The day was beginning to wane, the sun was in the lower quadrant of the sky. Common sense dictated that they should send the people away to find lodging and food.

Okay, at least the apostles were thinking about others. Or so it appeared. Or were they thinking about themselves because they too were hungry and tired? Probably the apostles had a few selfish thoughts. And they were definitely not thinking about Jesus. If they had really trusted Jesus, they would have submitted themselves to His timing. If they really trusted Jesus, they would have suspected that He could create food to feed the people. If their focus was on Jesus, they would have been satisfied that the people were learning and being drawn into closer fellowship with Him.

A delicate balance of ministry is pictured here. On one hand, Jesus showed incredible compassion for the people. Maybe the disciples actually showed a little of that as they recommended that Jesus send them away for food and lodging. But when our ministry is wholly focused on the person, we will attempt to meet the person’s needs whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, apart from Jesus’s words. That results in people feeling very good about themselves, but not being conformed to Christ.

On the other hand, if we only declare the good news of the Kingdom, without showing compassion for the people, we will tend to become disconnected or unconcerned for the true needs of the people.

In this test, Jesus was bringing the apostles lack of faith and compassion to the surface. The Master’s command was a greater test. *But he said to them, “You give them something to eat” (v.13a).* Something to eat was definitely a “most basic need.” But a most basic

need is not the same as the most important need which is faith in Christ. In saying, “You give them something to eat” Jesus presented the opportunity for the disciples to meet a basic need. The immediate response had to be, “We can’t even meet our own needs in this matter.” The apostles might have had enough food for themselves on hand. But that was not likely because they had to rely on the food brought by a little boy.

So the apostles were faced with an impossible dilemma much like we face ourselves. What do you do when you are asked to feed several thousand people and you have no food, no grocery store nearby, and even that doesn’t matter because you don’t have enough money? There was absolutely no way out of this corner by human means. We seldom find ourselves in that canyon of circumstances. But if we do, how do we respond? Do we dig deeper, try harder, think more clearly, cry louder, or what? Or do we bow our hearts before our Lord, open our hands, and admit, “Lord, I am helpless. Fill my hands and my heart with Your will.”

The Expression of Authority (vv.13b-17).

The followers faced a legitimate problem (vv.13b-14a). There was a great need for food and little provision available. *They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish – unless we are to go and buy food for all these people” (v.13b).* Does it seem a bit hard to believe that in a crowd that size there were only five loaves and two fish available? What kind of people would make a trek of at least three miles (probably more) into a remote area without taking provisions? Why was the little boy the only one prepared? Most likely he had a thinking, planning mother. And most certainly, this was all part of God’s plan.

Also, considering the size of the crowd, how much money did the disciples have if they thought to buy food for all those people? Sometimes in our faith tests, just when there appears to be no way out, we become aware of a little sliver of hope, like two fish and five loaves. Here is a family with a child who needs a medical procedure. Insurance will not cover the cost and the only money the family has available for a \$10,000 procedure is \$100. We would call that hopeless. We would conclude that it is not God’s will for the child to

have the procedure. But wait! Where did they get that \$100? Is that money available only because they worked hard and spent wisely? In a sense, yes. But more important is the reminder that every good and perfect gift comes from our Heavenly Father. If God can provide needy people with \$100, God can provide a needy family with \$10,000 if it is His will. Our problem is often not an inability to trust God to provide. Our problem is trusting God’s will enough to accept it.

It is in understatement to conclude that there were a lot of people in need at the moment. For there were about five thousand men (v.14a). To estimate the crowd at 5,000 **men** was common in a culture where men counted and women and children were not deemed as important. Surely this was not a men’s meeting, an old Bill McCartney “Promise Keepers” gathering. No, there were sure to be women and children present also, which would swell the actual number closer to 20,000. That represented an insurmountable need.

I just finished reading a biography about Susanna Spurgeon, wife of Charles Spurgeon. I was reminded that even when he was in his early 20's Spurgeon was responsible for a congregation of over 5,000. Knowing the energy and commitment it takes to care for a comparatively small congregation, I wonder that he was not regularly overwhelmed with the needs of the people.

Not to worry about the number! Because Jesus took control of the test, the people were satisfied (vv.14b-17). It is encouraging to read that the followers obeyed the Master. *And he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” And they did so, and had them all sit down (v.14b-15).*

First, Jesus gave a plan to the apostles. Why did He suggest groups of fifty? In Mark’s account Jesus recommended groups of 100’s and 50’s. I would have thought it was better to divide 20,000 by 12 and, therefore, have 12 groups of 1,666. That’s my problem, I am always trying to out think God, which is to make myself the Master. Besides, some well-meaning student of the Word will point out that Jesus would never command His apostles to do anything that has the number 666 in it. Maybe the disciples wondered about the plan also.

But, whether they wondered didn’t matter because the apostles submitted to the plan and carried it out. When we truly know our Master’s will, we must trust it enough to do it instead of trying to

improve on it. And so much of the Bible reveals the Master's will. But you cannot know those matters of the Lord's will if you don't read His message to you. The other day I was reading through Psalm 119 in my personal devotional time. I realized that I had read six sections of the Psalm and underlined a dozen clear expressions of what God desires for me to do. That is His will. Do I trust Him enough to obey?

Ultimately, we discover in this story that the Master has authority to set aside the laws of nature. He created food outside the laws of production. *And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them (v.16a)*. Have you ever wondered why Jesus said a blessing before distributing the food? This was not a mystical or magical thing like "hocus pocus" that was necessary to perform the multiplication of bread and fish. By the way, most people are not aware that the term, Hocus Pocus, arose in the 1620s. We know it as a common name of a magician or juggler, a sham-Latin invocation used in tricks. But it is likely that this phrase is actually a perversion of the sacramental blessing from the Mass, *Hoc est corpus meum* meaning "This is my body."

Rather, Jesus taught an important lesson to us by this blessing. He taught that we should continually remind ourselves that all blessings (including our food) come from our loving Heavenly Father. We see Jesus again blessing food and drink at the Last Supper. Therefore, praying a blessing over your food is not just a good Southern tradition. If you doubt that it is a Southern tradition, the next time you are north of the Mason Dixon line, look around the restaurant and see how many folks bless the food. No, praying a blessing for the food is a good reminder to everyone at the table, and everyone in the restaurant who is watching you, that God is the source of our blessings.

Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd (v.16b). That is not how bread and fish are made. It was a miracle by changing the laws of food production. God the Son thanked God the Father for His provision, and then began to break off chunks of bread and fish. Try to imagine how long it would take for one Man to break off chunks of bread and fish for 20,000 people.

All the people received food, all ate, and all were satisfied (v.17a). This line is the promise for all who trust Christ. We eat of

His provision and are satisfied. As we feed on His Word, we feed on Himself. How can a child of God feed on His Word regularly and not be satisfied? That will happen only when we are distracted by the world—in which case, we are really not feeding on His Word.

We have some grandchildren who have a hard time eating. They are always fooling around with each other, watching out the window to see what is going on outside, or singing. Do they appear to be happy? Yes. Are they being nourished? No. They are like too many Christians who are distracted by their world which seems to make them happy. But they are spiritually famished. They are not being strengthened in the inner man by Christ. And when the time of trouble comes, they will not be prepared to stand fast in the Master's will.

And there was leftovers for the next day. *And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces (v.17)*. I realize that the big question here is, "Where did they get the twelve baskets?" That is not the point! The point is, when God pours out His blessings, it is often more than we can contain or need. It is also true that in the time of deepest need it seems like our Lord provides only enough strength to get through the day. That is sufficient.

What is there in your life about which your Lord and Master is ignorant? Have you talked to Him about it? Have you exhausted your own resources trying to meet the need? Can you really trust Him to keep His promises? Do you know His promises? And there are people who do know the Lord's promises and have experienced how they satisfy. Break off some of the pieces and share them with the multitude of needy people around you.