

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"God Wants to Work Through Us."*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse and we find ourselves halfway through **Luke 9:16**. We're in the middle of one of the most familiar accounts in Scripture: "The Feeding of the 20,000."

Let's briefly look at **verse 13**...

Luke 9:13 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."

Jesus told the Apostles to feed all these people, but they wouldn't do it.

For a moment I want you to consider what Jesus could have done instead of asking the Apostles to do this...

- If Jesus could feed thousands of people with only five loaves and two fish, He could've fed thousands of people with ZERO loaves and ZERO fish.
- Or He could've called down manna from heaven. This miracle took place in the wilderness and Jesus had the people sit in companies. Many bible scholars think this recalls the way Israel camped in groups in the wilderness. Calling down manna would've fit the situation:
 - It would've been easier on the twelve.
 - It would've been much quicker.
- Or Jesus could've spoken a word and made the food appear in each person's hand. This would've been much more efficient than having the Apostles distribute the food to the large crowd, which must have taken a long time. Plus, this would've been much more dramatic than the way Jesus sort of silently multiplied the food and had it distributed.
- Or Jesus could've had angels take the food from His hands and fly it to each group. This also would've been more amazing than the way Jesus quietly went about it.

When I was going over my sermon with Katie she commented how awesome it would be to be able to have dinner appear any of these miraculous ways: *"Alright Lord, let the manna fall down from heaven now."* How many moms here wish they could make food miraculously appear one of these ways?

So this begs a question...

If Jesus had all these fantastic ways to feed the people, why did He ask the Apostles? The answer brings us to the first part of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: (PART I) THE LORD HAS CHOSEN TO WORK THROUGH US...

Jesus wants to work THROUGH us. He wants to use us as His ministers. He works WITH us.

I'm convinced that the Lord did the miracle the way He did to teach the Apostles that His method for meeting the needs of a lost world is through people.

Let me briefly share a verse that makes this point...

In **Rom 10:5-13** Paul discussed people calling on the Lord to be saved, and then he asked some very logical questions regarding that being able to take place...

Rom 10:14a How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

Hopefully you see the logic here. Paul says nobody is going to call on the Lord to be saved if they don't believe in Him. But how can people believe on the Lord to be saved if they've never heard of Him?

So we see how important it is for people to hear of the Lord. They can't be saved if they haven't heard! Can't get more important than that.

So how is God going to make sure people hear of Him? There are different ways:

- He could use angelic messengers.
- He could use some supernatural method like writing the message across the sky. He wrote a message on the wall in Daniel's day.
- He could speak audibly to people?
 - He did this with Moses from the burning bush and with Solomon on two different occasions.
 - Even with Paul on the way to Damascus!
 - My father-in-law is here today and he tells a story of an unbelieving friend who says, "I want to believe. Just tell God to provide a miracle or write it in the sky." But my father-in-law said, "God sent me! God wants to work through me to reach you"

And my father-in-law is right. That's how God works. The rest of **Rom 10:14** says...

Rom 10:14b And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

God's chosen way for the Gospel to spread – or for people to hear about Him – is through humans preaching it:

- And this doesn't mean the sort of preaching I'm doing right now.
- This means the sort of preaching all Christians are expected to do in their service to the Lord.

For reasons we might never understand on this side of heaven, God chooses us to be messengers of the greatest treasure we could ever find: the Gospel.

- There's no greater privilege than sharing that treasure with others.
- This should bless us that the God of the universe could minister to others lots of different ways but He's chosen to work through us.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: (PART I) THE LORD HAS CHOSEN TO WORK THROUGH US (PART II) EVEN IF WE'RE BUSY.

If you think about the account you see the kinds of people the Lord wants to work through...

What were the Apostles like at this time?

- They were tired. They were exhausted. They were emotionally drained. Jesus uses tired, exhausted, emotionally drained people...which is how we feel at times.
- He uses inadequate people. The Apostles were inadequate. Jesus asked them to feed the people and they said they couldn't do it.
 - If you feel inadequate at times, you're perfect for Jesus.
 - Maybe you feel like you don't measure up – like the Lord could never use you to accomplish great things – but the Lord has always used inadequate people who don't measure up to accomplish great things...b/c inadequate people who don't measure up are the only people God has available.
- Jesus uses busy people. The Apostles had been so busy, **Mark 6:31** says they didn't even have time to eat. He uses people who are busy by making them busier.

It's really a theme in Scripture that God uses the busiest people. Listen to these verses that aren't discussing rewards, but are discussing responsibilities:

- **Matt 13:12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.**
- **Luke 19:24 [The Master] said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' 25 [But they said], 'Lord, he has ten minas!' 26 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.'**

Whether in the church, or schools, or businesses, or government, or the military, or sports, or any area of life, the busiest people often find themselves becoming busier b/c they're the ones who can be most counted on. So they're the ones that receive even more requests.

I will be remiss if I don't provide a little balance to this though...

Even though I say all this about God using busy people, we know Scripture also teaches that we need rest.

In 2013, before Pastor Doug came, I was having panic attacks. I was completely overwhelmed and struggling to find rest. So there is a line to draw. We can't say: "*Oh, Pastor Scott said if I'm busy then God wants me to be busier.*" There is a balance in all of this. Yes, the Lord uses busy people but that doesn't mean we never say no...or we never sleep...or we never rest.

With that said, we do know the Lord wants us busy for Him and His Kingdom, so...

- Do you know someone hurting? Consider how the Lord wants to work through you.
- Do you know someone who doesn't know the gospel? Consider how the Lord wants to work through you.
- Do you know a neighbor with a need?
- Do you know someone who needs biblical guidance? Consider how the Lord wants to work through you.

God has access to LOTS of angels, but He still chooses to work through us.

One more thing I want to draw out of the account that's not in Luke's Gospel but is in John's Gospel is this was actually a test!

John 6:6 says Jesus was [testing] the apostles, especially Phillip, who seems to have been the one Jesus addressed directly.

- When Jesus said, "**You give them something to eat**" He was giving them a command.
- Since He told them to do this, it was something they could do. Jesus wouldn't have told them to do it if they couldn't do it.

But instead of receiving the command and finding ways to obey, they found reasons they couldn't do it.

So here's what I think we should ask ourselves: "WHY did the Apostles fail this test of feeding the crowds themselves?" And this brings us to the first part of Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: THE APOSTLES FAILED THE TEST BECAUSE THEY IGNORED THAT JESUS (PART I) HAD EQUIPPED THEM.

The Apostles actually didn't have any food. They got the loaves and fish from a boy. So when Jesus asked them to do this, it was even more overwhelming than it first looks. Jesus was asking them to feed the people when they didn't have ANY food.

In the parallel account in **Mark 6:37** they said to him, "**Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?**"

One denarius was the pay for one day's work. So the Apostles "counted the cost" and realized it would be about 250 days, or 8 months of wages to feed these people. Their comment was no doubt said with some sarcasm:

- Obviously, they didn't have anywhere near that much money available.
- They were in a desolate place with no towns nearby.
- Even if they went to Bethsaida to buy bread, there wouldn't be enough for that many people.

And let me be clear...

- Jesus wasn't trying to get them to feed these people in a natural way. He knew they didn't have the finances or resources.

- He wanted them to do it supernaturally or miraculously.

What's interesting about this account is if the Apostles had faith and obeyed Jesus, they would've been the ones to perform this miracle themselves...like Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament when they did similar miracles.

Jesus had given them the supernatural power to do this:

- He wouldn't have given them this command in **Luke 8** BEFORE He made them Apostles and gave them the supernatural power that came with the office.
- They had performed enough miracles on their missionary trip to know they could do something like this.

So let me say it like this: Jesus was stretching them, but He wasn't breaking them. He had equipped them to do this.

The lesson for us is whenever the Lord wants to work through us, we need to trust that He's equipped us to do it.

So let's think about the questions we shouldn't ask:

- *Do I want to do this?*
- *Do I feel like I can do this?*
- *Do I feel adequate enough?*
- *Do I feel like other people would do this better than me?*

The question is, "Since the Lord wants to work through me, how should I do it?"

We should be like Isaiah...

Isa 6:8 I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

Let's consider the next reason the Apostles failed...

LESSON 2: THE APOSTLES FAILED THE TEST BECAUSE THEY IGNORED THAT JESUS (PART II) WAS WITH THEM.

In verse 13 They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people."

It's almost like they ignored that Jesus was with them:

- They focused entirely on the size – or greatness – of the crowd, without focusing on the greatness of their Master.
- They looked at the situation very naturally, while forgetting the supernatural power of the Lord.

If Jesus is Lord over:

- The wind and waves...
- Sickness and death...
- The devil and his demons...

Then He's Lord over bread and fish.

The lesson for us is just like the Apostles had to remember the Lord was with them, we need to remember the Lord is with us:

- **Matt 28:20b** Jesus said, **“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**
- **Heb 13:5** the Lord said, **“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”** So we can confidently say, **“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”**
 - This verse emphasizes the impossibility of Jesus abandoning believers.
 - It's repetitive for a reason. It says **I will never leave you nor forsake you**, which is saying the same thing twice. It's like saying, *“There is absolutely no way whatsoever that I will ever, ever leave you.”*

And if you just follow me for a moment...

- When we consider that the Lord Himself is with us, we shouldn't ever feel like we can't do whatever the Lord wants us to do.
- Keeping in mind that the Lord is with us should give us the confidence we need whenever we recognize the Lord wants to work through us!

But since the Apostles weren't going to feed the people, Jesus ended up doing it Himself. Look at **verse 16...**

16 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.

This is our first time looking at the miracle itself. For as dramatic as the miracle was, there's actually very little said about it. I'll try to give you my best understanding of what happened...

Some people wonder where the miracle actually took place:

- Did Jesus give the loaves and fish to the Apostles and as they gave it to the people it kept multiplying?
- Or did the Apostles start distributing the food and they simply never ran out?

The tense of the verb **gave** suggests the multiplication of the loaves took place in Jesus' hands, and as He kept giving out the food to the Apostles more food kept being produced.

- He kept breaking the bread and as He broke it it kept multiplying.
- It was an ongoing action in Jesus' hands.

This means the Apostles had to keep returning to Jesus to receive more food from Him as they gave it to the people.

So the bread the Apostles needed to give to the people came from the Lord Himself:

- They didn't have to come up with it themselves.

- They distributed it, but they didn't have to create it.

I think this is a great picture of our service for the Lord. And this brings us to Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: WHEN THE LORD WORKS THROUGH US WE'RE DISTRIBUTORS, NOT CREATORS.

I love the way this account pictures our ministry for the Lord. As you think of the Lord multiplying the food and then giving it to the Apostles to give to the people, allow this to serve as a picture of your ministry for the Lord as He works through you:

- Whatever the Lord wants you to do...
- Whatever He wants you to give people...

You don't have to come up with yourself. You're only responsible with distributing it or carrying it out.

Earlier I discussed preaching the Gospel:

- We didn't create the Gospel. It's not a man-made invention.
- But we are distributors of it. The Lord created it and gave it to us to give to others...very much like the food in this account.

TRANSITION TO ZECH 4

There's another passage that has some similarities to this miracle, and I hope it can also encourage you. The title of the sermon is, "*The Lord Wants to Work Through Us*" and when you think of the Lord working through you I hope the miracle in **Luke 9** and a vision in **Zech 4** come to mind.

If you write in your bible, in **verse 16** please circle the words **he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd**, and write, "*Zech 4:1-6.*" Then you can turn to **Zech 4**.

Second to last book of the OT. We won't turn back to Luke.

Since some people might not be familiar with this book, so let me briefly give you the context...

Last week I told you Ezekiel was one of the prophets in Babylon along with Daniel and his friends. They were taken into Babylon after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, but...

- Obviously the Jews were able to return to their land or the Jews wouldn't have been in Israel in Jesus' day...
- And obviously they were able to rebuild the temple, or there wouldn't have been a temple in Jesus' day.

When the Jews returned to their land after the exile in Babylon they had a massive undertaking. They had to rebuild the city, and the temple.

Sometimes we feel intimidated when we think about the work the Lord wants to do through us, and if you think about all the work the returning exiles had to do, hopefully you can feel somewhat encouraged!

During this time, Zechariah was one of the two prophets, along with Haggai, that God used to encourage the Jews in their service to the Lord.

Let's start at **verse 1** to see one of the powerful visions God gave Zechariah to give to the people...

Zech 4:1 And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep.

We know this is a vision, b/c Zechariah saw it when he was awake. If it was something God showed him when he was sleeping it would have been a dream instead.

This angel serves as a helper to Zechariah throughout the book in understanding the visions he's given.

2 And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. 3 And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left."

This vision is of the temple lampstand or Menorah. Since Zechariah is speaking to people about rebuilding the temple, it makes sense the vision would be associated with the temple.



I put a picture of the vision in your bulletin below the lessons, if you want to briefly look at it with me...

- The lampstand had seven arms going up to seven different lamps.
- The seven lamps have a bowl above them that serves as a reservoir for oil w/ seven pipes going down to the seven lamps.
- There are two olive trees on each side of the lampstand and they provide oil that goes into the bowl and then down to the lamps.

So the vision is communicating that these lamps are going to have an endless supply of oil to continue burning and putting out light. I'd like you to also picture the endless supply of food that kept coming from the Lord's hands to the Apostles to keep distributing to the people.

As far as the symbolism:

- The lampstand represents the nation of Israel and the light they were meant to put out to the world as the witness nation.
- While the Jews were in Babylon their witness – or light – was darkened, but now that they're back in their land and able to rebuild the temple their light as a nation can resume.

The New Testament parallel is the church is the witness nation – or kingdom of priests – and we now have this mission: **1 Pet 2:9 YOU are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that YOU may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

- Israel was supposed to be the light in the OT, but in **Matt 5:14a** Jesus said, “**Matt 5:14a You are the light of the world.**”
- Israel was supposed to rebuild the temple so there would be a location for God’s presence on the earth, but in **1 Cor 6:19** Paul said, “**Your body is the temple of God.**”

Although the vision might seem pretty clear to us, watch Zechariah’s response, which is pretty encouraging to me...

4 And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.”

Whenever I read the Gospels and I see that the Apostles didn’t understand something, I’m always a little encouraged:

- It helps me not feel as bad when I don’t understand something.
- The same takes place when I read this and Zechariah didn’t understand what he was seeing.

It seems like – probably because Zechariah was a priest – that even the angel was surprised Zechariah didn’t know.

When the angel explained the vision, we can see the application. Look at **verse 6...**

6 Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

This is a pretty well-known verse. I think it’s unfortunate that despite the familiarity with it, not as many people know the context. Generally if you like a verse, if you learn the context you’ll like it even more.

We take lots of things for granted. For example, if you want light, you simply flip a switch. Throughout most of human history though, it was much more complicated than that. For example, in the temple, the lamps had to be continually refilled with oil.

But in this vision there’s a lamp that doesn’t need people continually refilling it:

- There’s an abundance of oil that the people didn’t have to create.
- There’s no human effort taking place.
- That’s why it says **Not by might, nor by power.**

Oil is often a picture of the Holy Spirit:

- Think of David being anointed w/ oil in **1 Sam 16:13** and then Holy Spirit coming upon him after that. The anointing with oil was a picture of the Holy Spirit's anointing that would follow.
- In **Matt 25:1-13** Jesus told the Parable of the Ten Virgins, and five of them didn't have oil for their lamps. This pictures them not having the Holy Spirit, or not being saved.

Since oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit, the way the olive trees provide a continual supply of oil for the lamps is a picture of the Holy Spirit providing a continual supply of strength for Zechariah and the rest of the Jews to accomplish the tremendous work God wanted to do through them:

- The work would take place, but it wouldn't rely on their strength and power.
- They would have an endless supply of **God's Spirit** to make it happen, and this vision illustrated it.

You can see why it would be encouraging to the Jews...and hopefully to you when you think of the Lord wanting to work through you!

Let me make the connection to **Luke 9** perfectly clear...

If you write in your bible, circle the words, "**Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,**" and write, **Luke 9:16**. That's when Jesus gave the Apostles an endless supply of food to give to the people.

- The Apostles in Jesus' day were given an overwhelming task: feeding 20,000 people when they didn't have any food. But picture the endless supply of food coming from Christ's hands to the Apostles so they can feed the people.
- The Jews in Zechariah's day were given an overwhelming task: rebuilding the city and the temple. But picture the endless supply of oil coming from the Holy Spirit to give the people the strength they needed.

And sometimes – when the Lord wants to work through us – we feel like it's an overwhelming task. I suspect if I asked each of you, there's something in your life that you would say seems overwhelming:

- Maybe it's raising your children...
- Maybe it's continuing in a difficult marriage...
- Maybe it's forgiving someone who really hurt you...
- Maybe it's seeking forgiveness from someone you really hurt...
- Maybe it's loving someone that you find to be particularly difficult to love...
- Maybe it's giving up some hobby or activity, b/c it's become an obsession or addiction...
- Maybe it's taking on some ministry...
- Maybe it's repenting of a life-dominating sin.

And when you feel overwhelmed, I hope these two illustrations – from **Luke 9** and **Zechariah 4** - come to mind!

The Apostles were going to serve the Lord for years to come...

- The Jews in Zechariah's day were going to serve the Lord for years to come...
- And we're going to serve the Lord for years to come.

And the supply and strength for God to work through us comes from the Lord Himself.

- As much as the Holy Spirit provided the oil – the might, power, and strength for the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem...
- As much as Jesus provided the bread for the Apostles to feed the people...

He provides what we need when He wants to work through us: **2 Pet 1: 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.**

If you have questions about anything I discussed this morning, or you'd like prayer for anything, Pastor Doug and I will be up front after service and we would consider it a privilege to be able to speak to you.

Let's pray.