

## You Give Them Something to Eat

Luke 9:10-17

June 27, 2021

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Read Luke 9:10-17

*“The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.”* (Psalm 12:6)

### Introduction

How many of you know the name George Muller? He was a pastor in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in England. His autobiography contains amazing stories of his being in great financial need but not telling anyone about the need except God in prayer.<sup>1</sup> In fact, his first act as a pastor was to stop renting out pews to wealthy people. The custom at the time was to charge people money to sit in church, but he felt that violated the Bible’s prohibition against favoring the rich over the poor. So he just set out a box for his salary, a very strange custom at the time. About a year later, he had no money and was beginning to doubt his method, perhaps he had gone too far in living by faith. But every time he prayed someone came by and gave him money to continue to work and eat, or it came in the mail. He truly believed that the Lord knew his situation and would supply all of his needs if he asked. He refused to run up debts with local merchants, preferring to suffer need and wait for the money or the food to come.

When Muller felt the Lord calling him to start an orphanage he had very little money. So he prayed hard and soon money, furniture, and clothing began to pour in from those who desired to assist him. People began to offer to work with the orphans. When one woman inherited 500 pounds (a lot of money in that day) and wanted to give 100 of it to the orphanage, he tried talking her out of it, but she resolutely insisted: “The Lord Jesus gave His last drop of blood for me. Should I not give Him the hundred pounds?” For 30 years, from 1830 to 1860, George Muller kept a journal of all of the times that they needed money for rent, food, wages, and clothing. Amazing story after story of how they would pray that their heavenly Father would provide it, and then people were prompted by the Lord to give, and it always covered their expenses.

That kind of faith didn’t just exist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Dawson Trotman started the Navigators ministry, and was buying a property in Colorado Springs for their national headquarters in the 1980s. He had to raise \$100,000 by a certain date, which was a huge amount back then. Two weeks before the deadline his business manager asked him how it was going. He said, “Great! We’re going to make it,” despite knowing that they only had \$3,000 of the \$100,000. He didn’t want to tell anyone how much they had so that people would not doubt they could make it. But God was working in people’s hearts and believers began sending in small amounts, from two boys who sent their jar of 900 pennies to a woman who sold her parrot and sent the \$30. The morning the whole \$100,000 was due, they only had \$78,000. A bank manager raised \$8,000 over lunch, but by the time he talked to Dawson, they were up to \$103,000, they didn’t need it. When Dawson went to meet with the man that he was buying the property from, they found out that the money had been wired to the wrong bank. Well, guess who the bank manager of the wrong bank was? That man who had just raised \$8,000. He opened his closed bank and they made the purchase in the nick of time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Autobiography of George Muller* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: The Story of Dawson Trotman, Founder of the Navigators* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).

If you believe in the God of the Bible, you know that He watches over His creation and works out His will. He answers prayer and makes things happen. The hand of God is able to intervene and help His people whenever He chooses. If we really believe that, we will learn to depend on Him for our daily bread and for all of our circumstances in life. Today's Scripture is about a time in Jesus' life when it looked like there was a great need with no way to fill the need, but the Lord provided miraculously and abundantly for all those involved. Because God is able to provide for our needs, let us never doubt His power no matter what our circumstances look like, and let us look to Christ to feed us spiritually.

The first two verses of our text show us that

### **I. Jesus Provided Rest, Teaching, and Healing (vv. 10-11)**

*<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.*

Three weeks ago we looked at the passage where Jesus sent the twelve out on short-term mission trips all over the region. This passage starts off with their return as the apostles all told Jesus their stories of all they had experienced while they were away. While Luke says just that they "*withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida*," Mark 6 says that Jesus told them, "*Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.*" Jesus was, and is, a great proponent of resting. As the book of Proverbs reminds us, God does not like sluggards and lazy people, the Scriptures call us to be diligent and hard workers. But we are finite bodies with built-in limits. We don't function well without sleep and proper food, and we are not wired to constantly go without taking breaks. The disciples need rest, so Jesus provided it.

The retreat was interrupted, though, by the crowds who found out where they were. Instead of being annoyed by the interruption, though, Jesus welcomed them and gave them what they needed too: teaching and healing. Over and over in Luke, we see Jesus' dual ministry of teaching and healing as His method of spreading the message of the kingdom. He beat back the darkness of oppression in people's lives and shone the light of spiritual truth. Clearly He drew large crowds who could not get enough of Him. However, the time and the place brought some factors into play on this day that presented a problem: everyone was starving. Jesus told the disciples to fix the problem, but they could not.

### **II. The Disciples Could Not Provide Enough Food (vv. 12-14a)**

*<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.*

Take a minute and try to imagine 15,000 people in one area next to a lake. We always think of this story as the feeding of 5,000 people, but verse 14 says there were 5,000 men, and we have to assume that women and children multiplied that number. The entire population of Smyrna is less than 13,000 people, so we're talking more than that amount crowded into one area. I don't think the disciples were being mean to say, "send them away to go get something to eat." This was the definition of a multitude, and as much as they hung on Jesus' every word as He was teaching, stomachs were growling and nobody did any advanced planning for food. So Jesus said, "You feed them."

I want to stop here and acknowledge a point of application: Sometimes we're called to take Jesus' words "*You give them something to eat*" literally and feed those who are hungry. Often the Lord puts people in our path who are in need, and we have the resources to meet their need. The question is just whether we will or not. James 2:15-17 – "*If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily*

*food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."* John Sr. is amazing at that; I feel like he's treated every hungry person in central DE to lunch!

Back to the text: Now the disciples may not have had graduate degrees at certified universities, but they could do some basic math. And it was going to be really expensive to buy bread for everybody. Even if Judas put all the money that he'd been stealing from their treasury back, they still wouldn't have had anywhere near that much. They also knew that five loaves and two fish are only going to feed the first few rows of people, and everybody else is going to starve. But, then again, they had just been out on mission trips where Jesus told them not to take any extra food along because they would be provided for along the way. And they all returned, none of them starved to death; they had experienced God's provision.

The disciples saw only need and scarcity; they would soon be reminded that that doesn't limit God:

### **III. Jesus Provided Miraculously (vv. 14b-17)**

*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 are scholars who downplay that a miracle happened at all. They will say something like, "The real miracle is that people saw how little food there was, and they were moved to pull the food out of their bags and pockets that they had brought with them and share it with everyone." Luke doesn't mention the source of the bread and fish, but John says that it was a little boy's lunch: "if he can share, gosh darn it, then I guess I can too," must have been the crowd's thinking. Wa-la, there's your miracle: a wave of generosity. R.C. Sproul tells about how the minister at his childhood church had another explanation: that Jesus had stashed a bunch of bread and fish in a cave that He stood over, so someone handed it up to Him, and since He had long, bulky sleeves, He could hide it and make it seem like He was multiplying the food.<sup>3</sup> That is clearly not how the text reads, nor do any of the other Gospels. These alternative "helpful" explanations are purposely inserting their own twist on the narrative because of their commitment to not allowing miracles in their worldview. If you start with the premise that it is impossible that God would intervene in human affairs, then you'll never allow any supernatural activity, you'll always explain it away. But Luke was a careful, honest historian who found evidence and witnesses to this story, so we take him at his word.

The miracle happened because Jesus asked His heavenly Father in prayer, and the Father responded. God could have sent enough bread for the whole world, but He gave what was needed for this situation. Jesus could have rained down manna from heaven, but instead He handed the food to the disciples to distribute. Jesus had commanded them, "*You give them something to eat,*" and then He had provided it when they could not. God takes a little of what we have to give and multiplies its effectiveness many times over. What a great reminder of how God works in us, giving us the strength, courage, and resources we thought we were lacking right when we need them.

How much bread and fish was left over at the end of the meal? Twelve baskets full. That seems like an oversight, too much because either Jesus didn't count the crowd correctly or a bunch of people refused, waiting for the gluten-free option or something. Well, no. Michael Card points out that the

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<sup>3</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Mark* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2011), p. 138.

Greek word for baskets used here is *kophinōn*, which refers to a lunch-pail sized basket. The point is that how many hungry disciples are there who have been laboring and are probably starving? 12. How many lunch baskets left over are there? 12. Each has their own food apportioned for him. They have been given their daily bread.<sup>4</sup>

How does Luke describe the reaction of the crowd to this miracle? *"They all ate and were satisfied."* That's all we get! He gives the number of baskets left over and then it's on to the next story in v. 18. John records a bit more detail of the crowd's reaction: John 6:14-15 says, *"When the people saw the sign that He had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!' Perceiving then that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by Himself."* As we would expect, the crowd was amazed and decided that Jesus was a prophet. They almost became a mob that would force Him to become king. I don't know if they were planning to march Him all the way to Jerusalem then and there, but Jesus had a very different timeframe for His life, and a much larger kingdom to rule than just Judea, so He didn't allow them to force Him to become king. But the crowd definitely realized it was a miracle, which is not so clear in Luke's account.

### **Conclusion: I Am The Bread Of Life**

This was not the first time that God had provided food miraculously for His people. In 1 Kings 17, Elijah was hiding from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel during the drought that he announced, and God had ravens deliver food to him twice a day. The more well-known incident is in Exodus 16 when Moses had taken the people of Israel into the wilderness for what would end up being 40 years before they were allowed to enter the promised land. God provided bread every morning and meat every evening and said, essentially, "Every day go out, gather what you'll eat that day, and don't keep any overnight. It will spoil, which is how I've designed it, because you have to trust Me to provide for tomorrow when tomorrow comes."

Now here in Luke 9, the Greater Moses provided food for the people. And it has a greater significance. Turn in your Bibles with me to John chapter 6, where Jesus reflected much deeper on the bread that He gives that feeds His people (verses 26-35, then 57-58):

*"<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. <sup>27</sup> Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.'<sup>28</sup> Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?' <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'<sup>30</sup> So they said to him, 'Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?' <sup>31</sup> Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'<sup>32</sup> Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'<sup>34</sup> They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, '**I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst...***

*<sup>57</sup> As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."*

Moses asked God to provide food for the people that he led in the wilderness, and God did. The greater Moses asked God to provide bread for His people, and God did it there as well. But in a much greater

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Card, *Mark: The Gospel of Passion* (Downers Grove:IVP, 2012), p. 90.

way, God made Jesus the bread that His people would eat! How do you eat that bread? *"Believe in Him whom God has sent."* – v. 28. Feed on this bread and live forever. I realized late in the week that this text would be a perfect one to roll right into the Lord's Supper - taking communion is an important part of recognizing what Jesus did for us in His death – dying on the cross, His body was broken, His blood was shed for His people, so we eat bread and drink from the cup. But we're going to have to wait until next Sunday when it's scheduled.

Trust God for your physical needs. Jesus said that your heavenly Father will provide what you eat and what you wear. *"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"* - Matthew 7:11. But your greater need is spiritual. You stand before a holy, righteous God who cannot be in the presence of your sin. All of humanity is born in sin and craves sin, turning our backs to God. We cannot save ourselves from this fallen condition because we are spiritually dead, and dead people can't make themselves alive. But into this predicament steps Jesus, the God-Man who lived a perfect life and offered up His body on the cross for our sins. We feed on Christ as the bread of life when we believe in faith that He has provided our salvation, that He has paid the penalty for our sins and suffered on our behalf. If you believe, you will have eternal life. If you eat this bread, you will live forever.

On a practical level: How does someone feed on Christ every day? We can't just make a decision to follow Christ once in our lives and then hope that going to church sustains us (though those are both vital); we have to be active in the life of faith. Let me suggest a few areas:

1) Whenever you have stressful times in life, you have a go-to behavior that makes you feel better. It's different for all of us; maybe it's comfort food/stress eating, a glass of wine or bourbon, internet shopping or real shopping, maybe it's retreating to your fantasy life, losing yourself in TV or video games, maybe it's something darker than those things. There's something that you do that is the place you run to when life is hard, when you don't feel good about yourself, when conflict is intense, when you need to feel better. And it works for a while, but not really. But you've established the pattern so long, you don't know how to break it. And Jesus stands there with His arms outstretched – *"Child, I am your refuge and your strength. Come to me, I will give you rest. All of those other things will not truly feed you. I will."*

2) Reading Scripture, even memorizing Scripture is invaluable to draw you closer to God and to give you daily food to feed on Christ. *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). I would recommend a devotional or a commentary that helps guide and inform your reading; I know a good one that got published recently.

3) There's a very famous John Calvin quote *"the human heart is an idol factory."* So knowing that your heart is just waiting to produce new idols, to start worshipping something in creation, we need to beat it to the punch, don't let an idol sit on the throne that Jesus should be sitting on. We need to remind our hearts that only Jesus is worthy of our worship. Remind yourself that when you wake up, remind yourself how empty worshiping other people and things eventually becomes.

Beloved, feed on Christ by believing in Him for salvation. Feed on Christ when you come to church, take the sacraments, and treasure Him as you worship and hear His word expounded. And feed on Christ every day, throughout the day, knowing that He will truly satisfy you. Amen.

Benediction - 1 Timothy 6:14-16 - *"... (to) keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will display at the proper time – He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen."*