

## **Our Sufficient Savior**

### **Luke 9:10-17**

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In Luke 9:10-17, Luke says, “And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done. Then He took them...” the “apostles” “...and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing.”

“When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to Him, ‘Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions...’ or “food” “...for we are in a deserted place here.’ But He said to them, ‘You give them something to eat.’ And they said, ‘We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people.’ For there were about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, ‘Make them sit down in groups of fifty.’ And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude. So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them.”

The Gospels recorded more than 30 miracles that Jesus performed in His ministry. Of those miracles, only one is recorded in all four Gospels. That is our story today; the feeding of the 5,000. The only exception is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That was a miracle! But the story of the feeding of the 5,000 is not only in the synoptic Gospels; it is also included in John's Gospel. And it is the only one that is included there.

It is also unique in that it is called a “sign miracle.” John records this miracle and then goes on to record that Jesus followed this miracle by preaching a sermon saying, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world....Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life” (John 6:51,54).

So this miracle no doubt pricked a lot of hearts and grabbed a lot of attention, so it made its way into all four Gospels. It is a favorite story of both children and adults. What storybook for children does not include the boy who gave away his lunch? What a blessed story it is! And we're going to learn some marvelous truths about Christ's sufficiency from it.

I like what Charles Edmond said. He said, “It brings the Galilean ministry of Christ to a climax.” So this miracle is climactic of the Galilean ministry. From this point forward, Jesus would for the first time begin to speak about the Cross, speak about denying yourself and taking up the cross. He's on His way to Jerusalem to die. And the people wanted to make Him king and give Him a crown, but Jesus sees the shadow of the Cross as He heads toward Jerusalem.

Matthew 14, Mark 6 and John 6 also record this miracle. There are four sections in our story in

Luke, and I want to unpack them. The first section is in verses 10-11 where we have the setting for the story of the miracle of feeding the 5,000. "And the apostles, when they had returned..." Remember in Luke 9:1-6, the 12 apostles had been sent out and commissioned to preach, to heal and to cast out demons. So they had come back from their mission, and Jesus was going to a debriefing with them and give them some rest and recuperation.

So they "...told Him all that they had done. Then He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida." This city was on the northern end of the sea of Galilee. At the northern end where the Jordan River flows into the sea of Galilee, toward the northeastern end is where Bethsaida was. So they probably went a bit north of there out into this desolate, deserted place for this time of relaxation and rest.

Verse 11, "But when the multitudes knew it..." They were on the northwestern shore of the sea of Galilee in Capernaum. "...they followed Him; and He received them." I would have run from them. "...and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing."

Why did Jesus take His apostles to a deserted place? Matthew 14:13 tells us. John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod, and Jesus had gotten that notice. So after hearing of John's death, He wanted to get away and pray with His apostles.

Also, the apostles simply needed rest. You can get tired serving the Lord—not tired of serving the Lord, but tired in serving the Lord. There are times you just need rest. Mark 6:31 says, "And He said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.' For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat." I like that. Vance Havner said, "If we don't just come apart and rest, we may just come apart."

I heard of a pastor who was taking a vacation. One of his parishioners was somewhat upset that he would take a vacation and said to the pastor, "You know, the devil never takes a vacation." Not a very nice thing to say to your pastor. And the pastor wisely said, "The devil doesn't have a body; I do. I need rest." I like this poem:

"Mary had a little lamb.

Was given her to keep.

But then it joined the local church,

And died for lack of sleep."

So Jesus is just taking them away to have some R & R. But then the multitudes saw them and followed after them. And how did Jesus respond? Verse 11, "He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing." He had compassion on them. I would have run away from them. The people knew where Jesus was; they took off around the lake and wanted to greet them. "They followed Him; and He received

them.” Matthew 14:14 says, “He was moved with compassion for them.”

We’re going to see that the apostles wanted to get rid of the people and send them away, but Jesus had compassion on them. He received them, the people needed truth and He spoke to them, verse 11. The people needed healing, so He healed them, verse 11. And the people needed food, so He would then feed them.

Isn’t Jesus compassionate? It would be great if we had the same kind of compassion. When we look at people, we need to see them as being sheep without the Shepherd and we would be compassionate to meet their needs.

I’m so glad that Jesus always has time for the multitude. He always has time for the individual. He’ll never turn you away when you go to Him. He said, “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). So we see His compassion and His mercy upon the crowds.

So the setting is in the area of Bethsaida, this deserted place, where we see all these people. And we’ll see that there were at least 5,000 men in the group, not counting women and children. That’s a big crowd. So it could have been 15,000-20,000 people. Jesus thought they were going to get away and have some R & R, rest and debrief. But the people followed Him, and He showed them compassion.

The second section is in verses 12-13, where we see the sufficient Savior. “When the day began to wear away....” The sun is setting and it’s starting to get dark. “The twelve came and said to Him, ‘Send the multitude away.’” Or “get rid of these people.” It’s classic. “...that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.’ But He said to them, ‘You give them something to eat.’” I like that. They want to send the crowd away; Jesus wants them to feed the crowd. “And they said, ‘We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people.’”

The apostles here are counseling Jesus. Think about that. Have you ever counseled the Lord? “Lord, I want you to do this—and this.” I have been His counselor many times. “Lord, I want You to heal. Lord, I want You to deliver. Lord, I want You to provide.” There is great faith by saying, “Lord, I trust You to meet the needs, to teach me my lessons, to use my circumstances for Your glory. I’m trusting You, so have Your way.” We can lay out our petitions, but we also have to surrender to His purpose and plan for us.

Jesus moved with compassion, and now the apostles are told that they need to feed the crowd and not send them away. But the apostles saw the crowd as a problem; Jesus saw them as sheep in need of a shepherd. They saw a big crowd, they saw the late hour in the afternoon when the sun was setting, they saw there was no food or lodging, they saw a mess and wanted to send the people away. But Jesus saw the need. How beautiful.

What did Jesus do? Verse 13, “But He said to them, ‘You give them something to eat.’” And I believe this has application for every pastor and church anywhere in the world. Jesus said to Peter, “Feed My sheep” (John 21:17). The pastor’s number-one responsibility as a shepherd is

not just to lead but to feed and protect. And he feeds the sheep by giving them the Scriptures, the Word of God, by preaching the Word—nothing more, nothing less.

Luke doesn't mention Jesus' question to Philip. Luke's Gospel is the most abbreviated of all the accounts. But in John 6:5, Jesus turned to Philip, one of the apostles, and asked, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Some theorize that Philip may have been from Bethsaida and knew where the restaurants were, where the In-N-Out was. And Philip was a very practical apostle; he took out his calculator and figured out, "No way, Jose! It ain't gonna happen!"

Jesus was testing him, putting him to a test to see what he would do. Jesus does the same thing to us; He puts us in an impossible situation. Remember that whenever Jesus asks a question, He knows the answer. Philip should have calculated, "Five thousand plus women and children, five loaves of bread and two fish, plus Jesus equals no problem."

We make the same mistake as Philip. We look at our limited resources and say, "No; we can't do it!" We forget to call on the name of the Lord or to put Christ into the equation and realize He is sufficient for all our needs. The apostles failed and looked to their own resources and abilities—like we do—and forgot Jesus. They calculated but forgot to include Jesus in their calculations.

Luke doesn't tell us where the five loaves and two fish came from. As you read the story in Luke, you say, "Where's the little boy?! I want to read about the little boy who gave away his lunch." But he's not mentioned.

The loaves of bread were actually about the size of a fist in the shape of a ball. They were barley loaves. Barley was used to feed the animals. So it was a primitive lunch. And the fish were small; little fish we would put on a spread. So obviously these weren't adequate to meet such a need.

I believe that God intentionally, purposely puts us in difficult situations—He allows them—for us to learn that He is sufficient to meet all our needs.

How did the little boy come into this situation? Andrew, one of the disciples, found him in the crowd. I always wondered if the little boy willingly gave up his lunch, or did Andrew grab it from him? But we know his mother gave him a lunch, and he shared his lunch with the apostles. This is what Jesus would use to multiply his lunch.

We do the same thing as the apostles in facing a problem. We take stock of our limited resources, strength and abilities, and finding them entirely inadequate, we are filled with despair and say, "It can't be done!"

Church boards classically do this. An idea, a ministry is proposed, but they decide they don't have the money. "We don't have the resources, the money. Forget it; it can't happen!"

Then you say, "Well, what about Jesus?"

“Yes, we can consider that. That might be a good idea.”

“How about prayer?!”

“Great idea; let’s pray and ask God to provide.”

If you look at your resources and you don’t have the power to overcome sin, Christ can give you the strength. If you look at your marriage and it’s not going to survive, you look at your abilities, your resources, and you’re filled with despair. Or you look at your health, you’ve been diagnosed with some incurable disease and you think, “What am I going to do?!” Christ is sufficient. You look at your bank account and you think, Where is the money going to come from?! Remember to calculate Jesus into the equation.

You look at your ministry—the world needs to hear the Gospel—but you feel so overwhelmed. Trust the Lord. You look at the church and you see all the issues and concerns. Put it in God’s hands and realize He is capable. So don’t forget Jesus’ love, His compassion, His power and His provision, based on His promises in His Word.

Now we move to the third section of our story, verses 14-16, Christ’s all-sufficient power. Here’s where we see the miracle. “For there were about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, ‘Make them sit down in groups of fifty.’” God is a God of order. He didn’t just throw the food at them; He had them neatly sit down in groups of 50. “And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish.” The other Gospels say that they handed them to Jesus. So the little boy handed his lunch to Andrew, and Andrew handed the lunch to Jesus. And what a difference! Once the food is put in Jesus’ hands, Christ is sufficient. “And looking up to heaven...” what a picture! “...He blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude.”

I think this is one of the most beautiful pictures in the Bible. You have all these people all gathered around in perfect rows sitting on the grass probably in beautiful robes. They probably looked like flower gardens on the green grass.

Jesus gets these five, barley loaves of bread and a couple of sardines, He lifts them up and blessed the Father. I would have said, “It’s not gonna work! This isn’t right! This is insufficient! This is inadequate! What’s goin’ on here, Lord? Don’t you see the crowd?! Five loaves and two fish?!”

Note that Jesus blessed God. How happy and grateful we should be that God provides for us. Even for our little, meager provision we should be blessing God and thanking God.

Then Jesus “blessed and broke them, and gave them.” The same process happens in our lives; He blesses us by breaking us and then distributes us to feed the hungry multitude. Then the disciples put the food before the people.

I wish I could have been there! I wish I could have seen it multiply! Did Jesus break off a piece

and it just grew? Hollywood could have made a movie of this. Can you imagine?! He hands you a little piece of bread, He hands you a piece of a sardine, and you're going out to distribute it to 5,000-plus people! What a step of faith!

This is the only miracle that Jesus performed in which His disciples participated and were partners in the miracle. The bread could have gone right from His hands into their mouths. "Open up!" Or He could have just made it appear in their laps. But He gave it to the disciples, and they partnered with Jesus in this miracle.

And God wants to use us. Jesus did what only He could do, and the disciples did what they could do. They participated in this miracle. What a blessing!

Let me give you some lessons here. Number one, God can use very small things if it's given to Him. God can use what seems to be insignificant and small if it's given to Him. Remember what David did to Goliath? All he had was five, little stones in a pouch. And he took one of those stones to knock out that giant. How awesome! God uses insignificant people and things to do great and glorious and wonderful things! "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise" (1 Corinthians 1:27). Little is much if it is put in His hands.

Verse 16 says, "He took the five loaves and the two fish." The other Gospels say that it was handed to Him. Jesus only worked when the loaves and the fish were placed in His hands. Again, I wonder how difficult it was to get the lunch from the little boy.

This was a miracle. William Barclay, in his commentary, says that actually everyone in the crowd had a lunch in their sleeve. I don't read that in the Bible, but that's what he said. When they saw the little boy willing to give up his lunch to feed the crowd, it touched their hearts, so they pulled their lunches out and all ate together. It was the miracle of the hidden, sleeve lunch. I don't think so. It was a divine miracle.

So little is much when placed in Jesus' hands, but He has to bless it and break it to be able to distribute it. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God." It doesn't say, "Freak out, and know that I am God." In the Hebrew, "Be still" literally means "Take your hands off." Take your hands off your husbands, ladies, and know that He is God. Take your hands off your wife, and know that He is God. Take your hands off your children, your grandchildren, and know that He is God. Put them all in His care. Let Him take care of it. Take it from your hands to His hands, and little is much in the hands of Jesus.

Number two is that God wants to use us to bring the bread of life to a needy world. Jesus did what the disciples could not do—multiply the food—but He didn't do what the disciples could do—distribute it. Jesus wants to use you and I to perform miracles. So if we will calculate Him into our situations, trust in Him, put our problems in His hands, He will work and use us for His glory.

Number three is what God blesses, He also breaks, and what God breaks, He also blesses. If you want to bless, you have to bleed. If you want to be used by God—I'm convinced of this—

you have to be broken. Paul the Apostle had to have a thorn in his flesh to keep him humble and dependent upon God. And like the apostles said, "Send the multitude away," Paul pleaded three times, in 2 Corinthians 12:8, for the Lord to take the thorn away. But God said "No."

"No" is considered an answer to prayer. I hear people get all upset and tell me, "I prayed and God didn't answer!"

"Yes, He did. He said, 'No.'"

But then the Lord said to Paul—as He'll say to us—"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." I love that word "sufficient." And when Paul heard that, he said, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities....For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

So God wants to use us to reach a needy world, if we will depend upon His all-sufficient grace. He wants to bless us and break us and use us for His glory. Remember that, if you are in the breaking process right now: whom God blesses, God breaks.

Now in section four, I want you to notice the miraculous supply, verse 17. "So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them." Ladies, if your husband ever complains of leftovers, read this verse to him. Jesus saved the leftovers.

Notice three things about this. First, the miracle was suitable; they all did eat. No one went away hungry. Second, it also was satisfying; they were literally filled. The word "filled" means "glutted." It's like at Thanksgiving: you eat all that food and they say there is dessert, but you can't eat any more, yet you say, "Oh, yes; I can!" There's always room for dessert. They were actually glutted. And third, it was sufficient. "Twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them," one for each of the apostles.

By the way, the word "basket" in the Greek means it wasn't a little, wicker basket to put bread in; it was a basket large enough for someone to climb into. It's the same Greek word used for Paul when he got into a "basket" and was let down outside the wall of Damascus to escape those who tried to kill him (2 Corinthians 11:33).

So these baskets in this miracle were so big that they were full of food, and when God does a miracle, it's overflowing.

Can you imagine the little boy going home and telling his mom what happened that day on his picnic?! This is not in the text; it's from the white spaces of the text. "Mom, you won't believe what happened to your barley bread and your sardines! Jesus broke them, blessed them and fed thousands of hungry people!" What an awesome thought! The Bible says, "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom."

Now we learn a couple of closing things. Jesus is sufficient to meet all our needs. You can take that to the bank. Whether it's physical needs, emotional needs, spiritual needs or financial needs, Jesus is sufficient to meet all your needs.

"But we don't have money in the bank!" It doesn't matter; you have Jesus Christ.

"All the doctors said that nothing can be done!" Put Jesus in the equation. Your marriage looks like it's going to fall apart—bring Jesus into the equation. The Bible says that "A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Bring Christ into your marriage. Put it into His hands and take your hands off. Trust the Lord.

I'm absolutely convinced, from Scripture and from life experience, Jesus will never, ever let us down or disappoint us. If you trust Him, if you put it in His hands, He will take care of you. What a marvelous thought!

And as I mentioned earlier, this miracle was a "sign miracle." So Jesus broke into a sermon in John 6:35 where He said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

Our spiritual need is greater than our physical need. You might be reading this and thinking, "I have all these needs," but the greatest need is to get right with God. Your greatest need is to repent of your sins and to believe in Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross and paid the penalty for your sins and rose from the dead. Now He ever lives, and "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). Your greatest need is to get right with Him, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). It profits you nothing.

So if you haven't given your heart to Jesus Christ, make sure today you do that.