

The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

¹²Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, “Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place^a.” ¹³But He said to them, “You give them *something* to eat!” And they said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people^b.” ¹⁴(For there were about five thousand men^c.) And He said to His

^a 9:12 **the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, “Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place.”** This statement was not selfish by itself because it would only be natural to expect people to provide for themselves while they are traveling. Since Luke said (verse 10) that we are near Bethsaida and John said that this event took place on the “other side” of Galilee (John 6:1), the location of this event was probably on the slope east of Jordan on the northeast corner of the lake. John also gives us a time, saying that Passover was near (John 6:4). It is very possible that these were Passover pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem from points north who would have traveled by the main road around the north end of Galilee.

The word translated “desolate” is commonly rendered “wilderness.” It refers to a place where there is nothing. Jesus had a massive crowd of tired, hungry people in a place that had nothing to offer. The twelve must have thought that the only way the crowd would disperse is if Jesus told them to leave.

^b 9:13 **“You give them *something* to eat!” And they said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people.”** John records Philip pointing out that 200 denarii (200 days wages for a common laborer) would not be enough for everyone to have even a snack (John 6:7). Perhaps this was the amount Judas the treasurer had in his bag. They did their calculations and inventoried their supplies. Remember that Jesus had only recently sent them out and commanded them to take no extra food or money (9:3).

John (6:9) tells us that this was actually the lunch of a small boy. He also records in the same verse that the loaves were made from barley, food of poor people. The fish, based on the specific word John uses (*opsaria*) was possibly like a smelt or a sardine.

This almost looks like Pharaoh’s command that the Israelites gather their own straw to make bricks. Just remember that these disciples had just returned from witnessing the great power of Jesus flowing through their hands and mouths. If that could happen without His physical presence, what might occur when He is near? This request was not unreasonable because His timing is always perfect. The Lord made an impossible demand and He knew it was an impossible demand. The only way mere mortals could have kept such a command was to appeal to the Master. He had them where He wanted them like He had Israel next to the Red Sea, the priests preparing to cross the Jordan and the three Hebrew children threatened with a fiery furnace.

^c 9:14 **there were about five thousand men.** Added to the unlikelihood of finding food in a desolate place was the size of the crowd. Luke wants us to see how impossible were the odds. The twelve somehow got an accurate count, possibly based on the seating arrangement by heads of families (the word “men” can only read “men”). The nation had gotten used to an orderly arrangement by tribe as Israel wandered in the wilderness (Numbers 2).

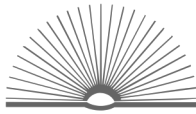
Numbers are not unimportant when God gets the glory for them. This was not just an account of the disciples and gospel writers. Jesus kept track of the head count and used the actual numbers from His two multitude-feedings (4000 and 5000) to teach His disciples a lesson (Matthew 16:9-10).

The Gospel of Luke
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disciples, “Have them sit down *to eat* in groups of about fifty each^a.”¹⁵ They did so, and had them all sit down.¹⁶ Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke *them*, and kept giving *them* to the disciples to set before the people^b.¹⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets *full*^{c, d}.

^a 9:14 **Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each.** It would have been easy to number the crowd because it appears the Master made them sit in 100 groups of fifty families each. You see the order of the Creator. It is like during the week of creation when He set the stars in place and the way He has the hairs on your head numbered.

^b 9:16 **looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people.** Smart people have argued that we know scientifically that there really is no “up” and that God is really not “up.” So why did the Lord look up to heaven? To teach us the transcendence of God.

^c 9:17 **they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.** The word “satisfied” could be paraphrased “buffet full.” Notice that the massive amount of leftovers would have removed any doubt that Jesus was capable of satisfying the hunger of those who serve before having their own needs met.

^d 9:12-17 The feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle of Jesus recorded by all four gospel writers. Even the most committed liberal theologians who cannot bring themselves to believe in genuine miracles cannot deny that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each believed the account he recorded. This is a story of contrasts: isolation and intrusion, selfishness and sharing, famine and feast.

This event communicates how following Jesus is full of impossible demands and impossible provision. God’s best resources become available when your resources come to an end.

What are some of the heart attitudes that bring God’s children to go without their perceived needs in order to serve?

1. Knowledge that He wants you in that vulnerable position. Consider how many other people in history God has schooled by supplying all their needs through lean times.
2. Knowledge that there is a very precise plan already in the works. That plan is always better than yours. Serve Him by serving others because you know His character, not because you have figured out how He will resolve your questions.
3. Knowledge that giving for Jesus’ sake never leaves you without provision. Your last worry should be about yourself. Lots of people Jesus healed would be ungrateful or otherwise use their new strength for sinful purposes, but He still showed compassion.

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