



# GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli † Deo † Gloria

**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**  
***Jesus Feeds Five Thousand***  
Sermon Notes  
**Luke 9:10-17**  
**July 1, 2012**

<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. <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. 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.

- Ever since the Fall, man has sought to live lives of self-sufficiency and independence from God.
- In fact, when Adam and Eve sinned for the first time, they did so because they seized from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, disobeying a direct command from God.
  - When one considers the meaning of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, it becomes clear that it represented the Tree of all knowledge, to include an understanding of Good and Evil.
  - Therefore, as each one of them “seized” from the fruit of this tree, they did so as an act of complete independence from God, attempting to understand the basis of good and evil independent of and apart from Him.
  - Yet, God alone (and His character) is the basis of all righteousness. Therefore, only God is good, and sin is always a function of falling short of God’s glory.

- In other words, it is impossible to understand “good” and “evil” apart from knowing God.
- However, that has not stopped men from trying, ever since the fall.
- As the Scriptures have described mankind, “They do what is right in their own eyes.” In so doing, man, just like Adam and Eve, make themselves to be god.
- **And, when we attempt to live lives independent of God, we “will surely die.” We may deceive ourselves into feeling like we are “liberated” when in actuality we enslaved to our own sin.**
- So, when Christ selected for Himself twelve disciples through which to spread His Kingdom, He took twelve fallen human beings who were as fallen as each one of us.
  - Naturally, each apostle was self-sufficient, believing that they could live productive lives based on their own strengths.
  - Therefore, Christ taught them their error and sin. But as always, He did so with grace and gentleness.
  - And this particular parable is a classic example of Christ teaching His disciples of their own inadequacies apart from Him.

- In fact, so central is this parable (the feeding of the five thousand) to the development and growth of the disciples, that it is one of only two parables that appears in all four Gospels (the second being the account of the resurrection).
- And from this parable, we too learn of our own deadly self-sufficiencies. We, like the apostles, must learn that “we can do all things through Christ” and apart from Him, we can do nothing.

- I. The Apostles’ Report to Jesus**
- II. The Difficult Situation**
- III. The Impossible Command**
- IV. The Work of Christ**
- V. The Sufficiency of Christ**

## I. The Apostles' Report to Jesus

<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.*

- In Luke 9:1, we read that Jesus “called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, <sup>2</sup> and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”
  - As the apostles went out, they did so in great power from Christ. So powerful was their witness that we read in Verse 7: “<sup>7</sup> Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, <sup>8</sup> by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. <sup>9</sup> Herod said, “John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?” And he sought to see him.”
- And so, here in Verse 10, Luke writes that the Apostles have returned to Jesus and are now reporting to Him all that they had done.
- Then, Jesus “took them and withdrew to a town called Bethsaida.”
  - Bethsaida was a city located in Galilee on the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee.
  - As Jesus often did, He is withdrawing with His disciples for some much-needed and much-deserved rest. One can certainly understand when Christ and His disciples were so tired at this point:
    - Word is spreading regarding the miracles of Christ.
    - Now, it is clear that the apostles possess the power of God, therefore raising the interest of the Galileans as well.
    - The hostility from the Jewish opposition in Judea and Galilee continues to rise.
    - Now, the work of Christ and His apostles has caught the interest of Herod.
- However, the “retreat” of Jesus and His disciples will be short-lived.

## II. The Difficult Situation

<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. <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.”*

- Luke tells us that “when the crowds learned of it” (i.e., Christ’s withdrawal with His disciples), then followed him.

- Jesus could have sent them away, arguing that the Son of Man needed the rest that He deserved. However, He did not send them away.
  - As Christ always did, He put the needs of others above His own.
  - In fact, He took this as an opportunity to speak to the people of “the kingdom of God” and He “cured those who had need of healing.”
  - Indeed, Christ was driven by compassion and love for sinful man.
- Then, Luke writes: <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.”*
  - It appears that the day was coming to an end and sunset was quickly approaching.
  - Therefore, the disciples urged (or, technically, *commanded*) Jesus to wrap things up so that all of the people will be able to go into the surrounding villages to find food and shelter for the night.
  - Of course, the disciples were still pragmatists (and hungry!), thinking only of what was humanly possible. How could five thousand+ people be fed and sleep in the middle of nowhere!?
    - First, the disciples were no doubt hungry as well, and, as Philip Ryken writes, “one wonders how much this had to do with their request, especially since it was more like a demand. Basically, the disciples told Jesus to get rid of the crowds.”
- Secondly, notice the words of the disciples to Jesus, for they say to Him, “... **we are in a desolate place.**”
  - The term “desolate place” calls the reader to remember the Old Testament and the wilderness wanderings in Exodus 16. It was there, in the wilderness... **the desolate place**... that God provided for His people. Therefore, this parable will demonstrate Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Testament, as He once again provides for the people “in a desolate place.”
  - In fact, consider the words of John in his account of this episode:

<sup>25</sup> When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” <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.””

John 6:25-34 (emphasis added)

- Therefore, even though His disciples have urged Christ to disperse with the crowds, our Lord is going to use this as sign pointing to His true identity.
- In fact, the disciples may be very concerned, but Christ knew exactly what He was doing, and He was not going to be pressured to buy into limited, conventional thinking. He was going to use this as an opportunity to demonstrate His power and sufficiency, not just to the crowd, but to His disciples as well.

### III. The Impossible Command

<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.*

- As Jesus is healing and ministering to the crowds, His disciples demand that He send the crowd away.
- But instead of heading their demand, He makes a command of His own:

**You give them something to eat.**

- Jesus’ statement was emphatic, with Him saying, “**You** give them something to eat.”
- There is a bit of *irony* here, and that is that these apostles have just returned from being sent out by Christ and performing miracles and healings, and they are still “not getting it.”
- In fact, the disciples say, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish – unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” Luke then adds, “**For there were about five thousand men.**” [And this number likely does not include women and children].

- The disciples seemed to consider the following options for fulfilling the directive of Christ:
  - First the people could share what they had. Yet, this would clearly not be enough.
  - Secondly, the disciples could go in town to purchase food in order to feed the people. However, feeding these people would have cost a fortune. According to Philip in John's account (John 6:7), both John and Mark indicated that it would take about 200 *denarii* (about 7 months of wages) to feed the large crowd.
  - They do not even consider the third option: **ask Jesus for help.**
- What is clear, here, is that **Christ has given His disciples and impossible command in order to teach them a powerful truth – THEY CAN DO NOTHING APART FROM HIM.**

David Gooding writes that the words of Jesus ought to have “startled them into thinking that there might be more to the kingdom of God and the powers of Jesus than they had yet realized. Instead of that, the highest their thoughts could rise to was the possibility of going to the nearest merchants (wholesalers, of course) and of buying the necessary quantity of food.”

- **They must learn this lesson if they are going to be used mightily by God...and they will.**
  - Another interesting irony is that this is not the first time a miracle like this has occurred in the Scriptures. There is actually an Old Testament parallel, found in 2 Kings 4:42-44: “<sup>42</sup> A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, “Give to the men, that they may eat.” <sup>43</sup> But his servant said, “How can I set this before a hundred men?” So he repeated, “Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and have some left.’” <sup>44</sup> So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.”
  - So, Christ is acting in perfect accord and consistency with the narrative and pattern of Scripture, demonstrating His fulfillment of the Old Testament, and His disciples still “don’t get it.”
  - Darrell Bock mentions that “a prophetic picture exists here, though John alone of all the accounts will present the miracle in terms of provision of manna (Exodus 16).”

- Ultimately, the disciples were looking to themselves for their sufficiency, not their God.
- Yet, even today, Christ gives us impossible commands. What is so unfortunate is that we actually believe that these commands are possible in our own strength.
  - Matthew 5:48: “<sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
  - In Luke 7, Jesus says to the widow’s dead son, “<sup>14</sup> Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.”
  - And to Lazarus, He says, “Lazarus Come forth!”
  - Matthew 22:37-39: “<sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

John Owen: “To suppose that whatever God requires of us that we have power of ourselves to do, is to make the cross and grace of Jesus Christ of none effect.”

- **In fact, we must realize that virtually every command of Christ is impossible to fulfill apart from Him.**
  - When Christ tells us the “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” that is no less **impossible** than if we stood in the desert facing five thousand people and He said, “Feed the crowd,” to us.
- Yet, in His grace and mercy *towards His disciples* Christ will now step in to work.

#### IV. The Work of Christ

*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.*

- Christ, then, took over, commanding His disciples to have the crowd sit in groups of about fifty. And once they did, **He took the five loaves and the two fish, and he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples before the crowd.**
- One of Christ’s great examples for all of us occurs here just *before* he feeds the crowd, for, even though He was fully God, He committed His works to and demonstrated His dependence on His Father through prayer.
  - As children of God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ, we can turn to Him through prayer in no less sense than we turn to our earthly fathers.

- We do not know the words He spoke, but it is possible He spoke the Ancient Jewish table Benediction took the following form: “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth.”
- Then, after praying, Jesus begins breaking the bread and handing it to His disciples.
  - Over the centuries, liberal scholars have sought to explain away this popular miracle of Jesus:
    - Some say that Jesus taught the crowd to share and that the masses were fed because they all had brought with them a little food and began to share what they had so that this was really a “miracle of sharing.”
    - Another viewpoint is that there were wealthy women in the group who supplied the food. Christ, then just distributed it through His disciples.
    - Another perspective is that the story is just a retelling or an imitation of Old Testament accounts involving Moses (i.e., it really never happened, but was symbolic and allegorical).
    - Still another view is that Jesus took the limited food and broke it up into tiny little pieces so that everyone could partake (Much like the Lord’s Supper today) but no one was really filled by the food.
    - Finally, some scholars have suggested that Jesus hypnotized the crowd into believing that they were full.
  - There are certainly other “theories” but there is only one good explanation. This was a true miracle of Christ.
  - One scholar (Van Der Loos) correctly notes: “it is without doubt a fascinating business to investigate how human ingenuity reaches new heights in its efforts to eliminate the supernatural from the story of the feeding.”
- **This was, indeed, a miracle that demonstrated Christ’s power and authority as well as the disciple’s dependence upon their Master.**
  - Alexander Maclaren writes, “The pieces grew under this touch, and the disciples always found his hands full when they came back with their own empty.”
  - John 6:14 refers to this as a sign. Just as the manna came from heaven, that whomever ate lived. So Christ comes down from Heaven, and whoever partakes of Him will live forever. Jesus is the bread of life.



- Not only this, but in God’s infinite wisdom, Christ chose to use His disciples to accomplish His work.
  - Interestingly, because of Christ, **it was, indeed, the disciples who fed the people, fulfilling the words of Christ.** (Remember: “You feed the people.” And they did.)
- Each one of us comes to Christ with nothing. Yet, He uses us to accomplish His purpose and mission on earth. In fact, when we realize how little we actually bring to Christ is when He uses us the most mightily.
  - It is Christ who multiplies, not us.
  - May we never forget that the apostles were a band of uneducated Galilean men, and Christ used them to turn the world upside down. The world tells us to “believe in ourselves”; Christ says, “Believe in Me.”

“It is vain for us to attempt by ourselves to give real food to needy mankind with our five little loaves and two fishes – the insignificant gifts and powers possessed by us. But when we place at His disposal, in faith and obedience, everything we have received from Him, He will, in spite of our own insignificance and poverty, use us nevertheless to feed souls with the bread of eternal life. He sanctifies, blesses and increases our talents and powers, everything consecrated by us to His service.”  
Norval Geldenhuys

## V. The Sufficiency of Christ

<sup>17</sup> *And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.*

- From Verse 17 we learn that Christ provided abundantly, and in Him they **were satisfied.**
- It is interesting that the amount left over was twelve baskets. Many attempt to find significance in numbers in the Scriptures, but it seems clear here that the point was that **this was a lesson to the apostles – for there was one basket for each one of them.**
  - Indeed, God does everything with purpose and design and this is no different.
- John 6:26-27: <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.”
- May we never forget that if Christ can feed five thousand with five loaves and two fish, imagine what He can do with our resources, even as small as we are at GRBC.

J.C. Ryle writes, “The heart of man can never be satisfied with the things of this world. It is always empty, and hungry, and thirsty, and dissatisfied, till it comes to Christ.”

Isaiah 55:1-3:

<sup>1</sup> Come, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and he who has no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.

<sup>2</sup> Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.

<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me;  
hear, that your soul may live;  
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David.”