

“The Disciples’ Training Continues”

February 8, 2020

Luke 9:10-17

I. Introduction

When I became a physics teacher so many, many, many years ago, I wasn’t just taught a bunch of facts and then sent out to teach. There was classroom training, but there was also applied training—in some fields this is called an apprenticeship. In my case after learning all the so-called facts, I spent a semester shadowing a master teacher as I helped in his classes. Every so often he would tell me his reason for a particular activity or for a particular response to a class or individual. After that, I was given more intensive training as a student teacher. Now I was in charge of a class—it was up to me to determine the methods I used in teaching and even how I maintained discipline in “my” class. There was still a master teacher who would once a week critique what I had done with the goal of making me a better teacher. The ultimate test came when I got a job teaching math and physics at Greendale High School. Even though I was on my own, during the first couple of years, I still met with a senior teacher who helped me with any problems that I had. Even as the years flew by, I would still go back to college to get advanced training—both in methods of teaching and in the information being taught. I suspect that most of you have had a similar experiences in your particular fields.

The disciples went through the same kind of progressive training. They had learned from THE master Teacher. They had listened to Him as He taught and preached; they had watched Him as He demonstrated divine power over demons, disease, death and nature. They had observed Him interact with crowds and with individuals. After all their observing and learning, it was time for them to put all they had assimilated into practice—this we saw last week as Jesus sent the Twelve out on preaching tours throughout Galilee. But they weren’t done, there was still more to learn and more exams to take. Today, we see them fail their next exam.

The 4 Gospels record over 30 different miracles that Jesus did during His 3-year ministry in Galilee and Judah. But only 2 miracles are recorded in all 4 Gospels. One is Jesus' resurrection; the other is the feeding of the 5000. In Matthew's record in [Matthew 14:21](#) we read that **“the number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.”** All of Jesus' miracles were astonishing but the feeding of 5000 men plus women and children demonstrated His power over creation more impressively than any other miracle. To instantaneously create food for around twenty thousand people was something only the Creator of the universe could do—[turn to Colossians 1:15-18](#). Jesus is God.

II. Another Exam

A. The Twelve Return. The exam began with the return of the 12 Apostles from their individual ministries. Earlier Jesus had sent out the Twelve in pairs and had instructed them to preach a message of repentance throughout Galilee. Luke doesn't indicate how long they were gone, but their mission probably lasted weeks.

“When the apostles returned,” probably to Capernaum—Jesus' base of operation, **“they reported to Jesus what they had done.”** Some would have shared their success stories; others would have shared the persecution and rejection they had experienced. They all would have been tired from their experiences. Adding to their distress, [Matt. 14:12-13](#) adds that some of the followers of John the Baptist reported that John had recently been executed. The Twelve needed to rest after their labors and Jesus wanted to discuss their ministry with them, but, [Mark 6:31](#) says that **“because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he, i.e., Jesus, said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’”**

John's account in [John 6:1](#) says that Jesus recognized the Apostles' need for rest so they **“crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee.”** They crossed the lake to get away from the crowds. Someone has said that, *“If you don't come apart and rest, you will come apart.”* Even the Son of God needed time to rest, to fellowship with His friends, and to find renewal from the Father. The trip across the lake provided

the disciples with an opportunity to enjoy a short respite from the pressure of the crowds as they shared their experiences with one another and with Jesus. “They withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida” which was on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

B. The Relentless Crowd It’s a good thing they had some “*alone time*” on the Sea of Galilee, because the relentless crowd would not leave them alone. Luke wrote, “But the crowds learned about it and followed him.” John added in his account in John 6:2, “A great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.” To the tired and worn disciples, the crowds were a problem, probably even a nuisance, but Jesus did more than just *put up with them*, according to Luke, “He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God.”

As was His custom, Jesus not only taught the people, He also “healed those who needed healing”—Matthew 14:14 put it this way, “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” As the Good Shepherd, Jesus’ compassion extended beyond the spiritual needs of the people, it included their physical needs as well. The teaching and the healing filled the day and “late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him.” There was a problem.

C. The Problem They said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.” This was the problem: “How to feed the people.” They were in a remote area—a place where food was not readily available, so the disciples suggested dismissing the crowds—send the crowds away so that they could head for places to find dinner for themselves. From the disciples’ viewpoint, they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, and nothing could be done. Things looked particularly hopeless.

Jesus must have shocked His disciples when “He replied, ‘You give them something to eat.’” To the Apostles, Jesus must have seemed like He had had too much sun—what He asked was impossible. Earlier, when Jesus had sent them out in pairs, they had taken no bread and had to live off the hospitality of others. And they had all returned safe and sound. Now Jesus was again trying to grow their faith in

God as He forced them to acknowledge that there was no human solution to this problem. Just like in their travels, they needed to trust God to meet their needs. But they failed the test. They hadn't learned yet to take their eyes off of themselves and instead to look to God in faith.

After they explained that they couldn't buy enough bread to feed the multitude, Mark wrote in [Mark 6:38](#) that Jesus asked, "'How many loaves do you have? Go and see.' When they found out, they said, 'Five--and two fish.'" John's account in [John 6:8-9](#) fills in some of the details, "'Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?'" The loaves were flatbread wafers or biscuits and the small fish were most likely pickled and were to be eaten with the bread. This was a standard lunch for a small boy—not enough for about 5000 men plus women and children! The Apostles were baffled!

D. The Solution But Jesus had the solution—He had it from the beginning. Jesus would feed all the people. He didn't rebuke the disciples for their lack of faith; instead He put them to work. "He said to his disciples, 'Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.'" [John 6:10](#) adds that "There was plenty of grass in that place." "So, they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties" ([Mark 6:40](#)). Even though their faith was small to nonexistent, the disciples could still obey. All 4 Gospels record that there were 5000 men present; allowing for a reasonable number of women and children, the total number of people was probably somewhere around twenty thousand people. By sitting in groups, it made it easier to distribute the food and to get a relatively accurate count of people.

Then "taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people." Jesus multiplied the food and the disciples had the joy and the privilege of passing it out to the astonished crowd. Jesus could have miraculously passed out the food to everyone, but He wanted the disciples' faith to grow.

E. The Results There was no human explanation for what happened, so the Gospels don't try to describe how the miracle occurred. Miraculously, Jesus kept producing meals and giving them to the

disciples who continued to distribute the food until everyone was fed. Jesus/God doesn't do things in a small way, **“they all ate and were satisfied.”** The Greek word implies that they *“gorged themselves until they could eat no more”*—they were all completely full—no one went away hungry.

But Jesus didn't stop there. He didn't forget His own. After the meal was over, the disciples then gathered the leftover food and filled 12 small baskets with the leftovers of the barley loaves and the fish. The amount of leftover food was exactly enough to meet the needs of the Twelve. Christ not only supplied enough food for the hungry crowd, he also provided the next day's meal for the disciples.

III. Application

A. We need to trust Jesus Christ. So, what can we learn from this miracle? First, we need to trust Jesus Christ. It is so easy to look at the disciples and wonder *“Where was their faith?”* They had seen Jesus do so many miracles—healing the sick, casting out demons, calming storms, and even raising Jairus's daughter from the dead. They were even cared for while they were on their own evangelistic ministries. So, when a different type of problem came their way, they should have looked to Jesus and said, *“We don't know how, but we know You can take care of this problem.”* Instead, they would have driven the people away or tried to feed them in their own strength.

Don't we fall into the same trap? Something unforeseen comes our way and the first thing we try to do is to fix it ourselves. We don't go to God and ask Him to intervene or give us wisdom in what we should do. **James 1:5** says, **“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”** Later in **James 4:2** we read, **“You do not have because you do not ask God.”** Rather than getting all stressed out over how to solve a problem, we just have to turn to God. Peter eventually learned this lesson; in **1 Peter 5:7** he wrote, **“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”** Let's learn from Peter, James, and the rest of the Apostles, and go to our Lord and Savior in faith. We, like the disciples, need to learn to trust Jesus. Paraphrasing what Paul wrote in

Ephesians 3:20, “God can do anything —far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams.”

B. Second, we need to give Jesus all we have. The little boy didn’t have much to offer but look at what Jesus was able to do with one little lunch—He fed 20,000 people! We may not have much to bring to Jesus, but He can use what we have. Think about it: if that little boy had refused to share his lunch, there would have been one less shining deed in history. It may well be that the world is denied miracle after miracle because we will not bring to Christ what we have and what we are. *Little is always much in the hands of Christ.*

We aren’t a mega church; we don’t have a lot to offer God. We are like the little boy and his lunch; the widow and her “two very small copper coins”—turn to Mark 12:41-44. In 2 Corinthians 8:12 Paul wrote, “For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.” God can do great things with each one of you and with this church if you-if we will only trust Him and give Him all we have and are. Turn to Revelation 3:7-13.

C. Third, we must not neglect the spiritual or physical needs of others. Disciples of Jesus need to do more than lament over the crowd’s hunger and the lack of food while sending them away with nothing. We have not done our duty if all we have done is point out the problems in society and bemoan them. We have been called to go into the world to do something about these problems. The prime directive is to deal with the spiritual needs of the world and to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). But we must also deal with physical needs, James 2:15-16 says, “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?” Turn to 1 John 3:17-18. Jesus didn’t distribute the food Himself. He chose His disciples to do that. His plan is to reach the world through His people—it’s up to us now.

D. Finally, we must not neglect our own spiritual and physical needs. Jesus recognized His disciples' need for rest. One cannot serve others 24/7. Jesus' words to the Apostles in [Mark 7:31](#), **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest”** is an important one for weary laborers. But as this story shows, sometimes even when we feel tired and worn out, God may send those who need us. We need to rise to the occasion and help those in need. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in [2 Thess. 3:13](#), **“And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.”**