

## Here Comes Manna from Heaven . . . Again!

Luke 9:10-17

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Jesus gave His disciples supernatural and divine power on earth and commissioned them to go out and exercise that power in Israel. When they returned, the disciples were filled with awe and wonder, not at what Jesus did, but at what they did. Have you ever been tempted to do the same? Well, Jesus is about to give a needed and humbling lesson to these disciples, and to us today: when God works through us, God alone deserves the credit and the glory.

A newspaper reporter went to interview a successful entrepreneur who was worth \$20 million. He finally got a sit-down interview and he asked him, “How did you do it? How’d you make all this money?” The man replied, “Well, I’m glad you asked. It’s an amazing story. You see, when my wife and I got married, we started out with virtually nothing. In fact, we only had 5 cents between us. Well, I took that nickel and went down to the grocery store, bought an apple, shined it up and then sold it for ten cents.”

“What’d you do then?” The reporter asked.

The man said, “I went and bought two more apples, shined them up, and sold them for twenty cents.” The reporter was beginning to think how great this story would be when he wrote it up.

He asked with excitement, “Then what? Then what happened?”

The man replied, “Well then one my relatives died and left me \$20 million.”

Over the years, he had found it more interesting to think about that nickel and those apples than the gift he had been given. And over the years he had convinced himself that he had done something, forgetting that he had received everything.

Ed Hindson, [Ecclesiastes: Been There, Done That, Now What?](#) (Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 105

The disciples have just returned from their first tour of preaching and miracle working. Jesus delegated to them apostolic power, which would validate their ministry as well as authenticate their gospel message.

They had experienced several weeks of amazing activity and incredible miracles had flowed from their hands. It was a heady time—and as we observed in our last study—it will eventually go straight to their heads.

Soon, when they return from another impact trip and boast to Jesus about the demons that were under their control, Jesus effectively tells them, “If you want to rejoice about something, rejoice that you are going to heaven” (Luke 10:20).

Pride is knocking on the door whenever we are more excited about what God does through us than what God has done for us.



When has God worked through you, and someone else tried to give you the credit, or maybe you were tempted to give yourself the credit? How did you respond? How does it help your testimony when you deflect the glory to God?

I invite you back to **Luke's gospel and chapter 9**, and I'm convinced that had a reporter shown up and interviewed the disciples when they returned home from their first ministry trip where Jesus had given them the ability to cast out demons and heal the sick as they preached the gospel.

The disciples more than likely would have told the reporter what they had done, rather than what Jesus had empowered them to do.

Look, it's more fun to tell people about that apple you sold for a dime and the diligence you displayed rather than some inheritance you didn't earn.

One author put the problem of our human nature in a humorous manner; he wrote, “When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of that donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and singing praises, do you think that donkey had the idea that any of that was for him?”

Michael P. Green, 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching (Baker 1989), p. 199

Well, after kindly and graciously pulling the disciples away to debrief and instruct and teach them, we're now at verse 10 where the disciples are about to be taught, among other things, a valuable lesson in humility as you serve the Lord.

Notice verse 10:

*On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. 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. 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 9:10-12*

Don't miss this: the disciples are telling Jesus how to do ministry; they're now in charge; they are now instructing the Lord. After all, they're veterans at this thing—they've been on one trip.

So, they evidently know when it's time to stop preaching, when it's time to send people home. "Lord, try to wrap up that last point there and let's get people going. They need to eat supper somewhere." You see, they know better than Jesus.

But what they don't know is that Jesus is about to miraculously feed this crowd.

In fact, Jesus is about to demonstrate the only miracle that will be recorded, besides the resurrection, in all four Gospels. And that's probably because the disciples will never get over this event and the lessons they learned.

Now if you combine the clues we're given from all four Gospels, this event took place around 4:00 o'clock on a mid-April afternoon.

In John's Gospel account, it all begins by Jesus asking Philip this question:

*“Where are we to buy bread, so that these people*

*may eat?” He said this to test him...*

*John 6:5b-6a*

What was He testing? Their level of faith in His miraculous ability? Well then, they failed the test because it never crossed their mind that Jesus could perform a miracle on this scale.

Was Jesus testing their management and financial skills?

Evidently Phillip thought so.

Remember, Jesus specifically asked Phillip ***where they could buy the bread.***

Why ask Phillip? Why single him out? Because this was his hometown. He knew where the bakery was; he knew where the market was located. He knew the price of bread in this region.

And I love this, Phillip thinks the Lord is seriously asking how much money it would take.

So, he evidently gets out his pencil and his note pad and starts figuring away at the cost of this meal. "5,000 men plus women and children, multiply that by the cost of bread, divided by 10 little bites per person. Okay Lord, I got it." **Verse 7:**

*“Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.”*

*John 6:7b*

In other words, even if we had one year's average salary—and even if everybody took little bites—it won't work.

He's counting every penny and just can't come up with enough change.

This reminded me of those days when I'd look for change under the car seat or in the cushions on the couch, you ever done that?

I remember those days in seminary when Marsha and I would see how much change we could come up with together; and I'd go down the apartment steps to the laundry room vending machine and get one Dr Pepper and we'd split it.

Maybe you're there right now. You're counting every penny, wondering what the Lord is going to do to provide.

And that's exactly where Jesus is leading His disciples. I imagine He was smiling to Himself as they figured out how much money they needed—how much bread it would take.

Philip says here it'll take more than **200 denarii to feed this crowd**. Phillip evidently knows the baker won't take credit; it must be cash.

Luke says that evidently Jesus simply responded here in **verse 13**:

*But he said to them, "You give them something to eat."*

*Luke 9:13a*

Don't disperse this crowd; don't send them away; you men, *you* give them something to eat!

Here's the context:

- **You** guys have the miracle stories.
- **You** have power over demons.
- **You** guys just got back from successful ministry.
- **You are** enamored with things you've been able to do with your hands.
- So why don't **you** go on ahead and feed them?

This was a shocking command.

Now John's Gospel tells us that they found a boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish, so they had been scouting around while Philip was doing the math.



**Why do you think Jesus had his disciples go through this exercise of calculating the cost and trying to find food? What was he trying to teach them about their abilities compared to His?**

And that was all they could come up with! So, when Jesus tells them to feed the crowd, they're almost speechless. They stammer out here in **verse 13**:

*“We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.”*

*Luke 9:13b*

See, they are suddenly aware of their inability. They are suddenly confronted with the fact that all they had ever done—really—is shine up some apples, but everything else they had done was through power they had inherited and was not their own.

And they are so overwhelmed with this command and this crowd that they completely overlook their Creator.

Jesus is going to teach them some lessons in humility which will become the foundation for Spirit-empowered, God-honoring service.

He’s going to teach them:

- They have nothing to offer people apart from Him.
- Their hands are useless, unless His hands are involved.
- They have no power apart from His provision.
- Their inadequacy is the perfect opportunity to trust His sufficiency.

John’s Gospel account gives us the detail that Andrew was the disciple who found the boy’s lunch, but when he handed it to the Lord, he apologized and said to Jesus, **“But what is this for so many people?” (Paraphrased: John 6:9).**

In other words, “Silly me, for even handing this lunch to you, Lord. What am I thinking?”

The other disciples are probably thinking, “Way to go Andrew! That was brilliant. Give the kid his lunch back.”

But now it’s in the Master’s hands.

And here’s another lesson to learn: Jesus can use whatever you give Him, even a little boy’s lunch. This is about to become the most famous brown bag lunch in church history.

The amazing thing here isn’t just that Jesus will do so much with so little, but that He chooses to use the little we give Him to do so much.

I’m so glad for that because He will use today whatever you put in His hand. Don’t ever say, “I’m just one little person; I just have so little talent; I don’t have much experience.” Just put who you are and what you have in the Master’s hands, and let Him do the multiplying according to His will.

Now let’s look this lunch. It included barley bread, John’s Gospel account tells us. Barley was the common bread of the poor, it was coarse. It was less desirable in its texture and taste to wheat bread.

Barley was most often fed to the livestock, so this clues us in on the poverty level of this young boy.

The word translated loaves is a word that refers to pieces of bread that would have fit in the palm of your hand.

These would have been the typical small, flat, pancake sized pieces of bread.

Now this boy also had two fish. The Greek word John's Gospel uses is **opsaria**: a small fish the size of a minnow or sardine.

The people in this day added spices and relish to the fish to add some flavor to their meals.

Basically, this boy had some pickled fish to help his dry barley bread go down.

Now Jesus gives another command to his disciples, **verse 14**:

*"Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each."  
And they did so and had them all sit down.*

*Luke 9:14b-15*

Now remember, Jesus just told the disciples to feed this crowd, and they're shocked; they're sputtering to each other in disbelief, and *now* Jesus tells the disciples to seat the crowd.

But Jesus doesn't use a verb that means to just take a seat, He uses the ordinary term that means to recline at the table for a meal, which was their custom at low tables where they reclined and propped up on one elbow as they ate.

So, get this: Jesus is now ordering the disciples to tell them that a meal is about to be served; go ahead and get into a reclining position!

The Gospel accounts tell us that this crowd is around 5,000 men, add the women and children and this miracle isn't "The feeding of the 5,000," it really ought to be called "The Feeding of the 15,000."

Can you imagine the disciples panic? What are they going to feed 15,000 people?

But here's another reason why I believe Jesus had everyone recline before He performed this miracle: you see, they're all going to watch it happen.

And at first, I think the crowd would have been just as mystified as the disciples are terrified.

They've been called to dinner, but they can all see that the Lord doesn't have mountains of bread stacked up around Him; He doesn't have a boatload of fish that's just been delivered.

They're about to watch a stunning miracle—this would be an undeniable, visible, tangible, *edible* miracle. This wasn't a trick, there was no secret supply. I like the way one author put it: Jesus didn't have any fish up His sleeve.

Adapted from Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew* (Crossway, 2013), p. 407

And here's a deeper purpose behind this miracle: the Rabbis of Jesus' day were teaching that when the Messiah came, He would reproduce the miracle of the manna in the wilderness; the Messiah would deliver manna from heaven—again!

Jesus is about to answer the question of the Psalmist, in Psalm 78:19: "**Can God spread a table in the wilderness?**"

Jesus will answer, “Yes I can—let me show you.”

By the way, the crowd will be so blown away at this demonstration of divine, Messianic power—***John’s Gospel*** tells us—that after this miracle occurs, they will try to ***crown Him King***.

He has delivered manna in the wilderness again!

And it’s no coincidence that the very next thing He will preach, the Gospels record, is that He Himself is the Bread of Life.

He not only delivers manna from Heaven, He is the everlasting supply; He is—Himself—manna from Heaven.

Adapted from Hughes, p. 332

Now notice ***verse 16***:

*And taking the five loaves and 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.*

*Luke 9:16*

The Gospels record that Jesus essentially breaks the bread and fish apart and hands the pieces to His disciples.

Luke makes it clear that the miracle is occurring in His hands. ***He kept on breaking them and giving them to His disciples.***

Perhaps the disciples used their outer tunics to hold all the bread and fish as they walked among the crowd. Perhaps the men and women and children simply reached out and took handfuls at a time, then the disciples ran back to the Lord and got loaded up all over again.

I wonder, were they getting the point that Jesus was the supply, and they merely provided the service?

And that’s true to this day, church. Jesus is the Originator, He’s the ***Creator*** and we’re just the ***courier***.



Do you attend a church where God is glorified more than people? Do you fellowship with believers who are more worried about their own image than the image of God? How can you model the kind of attitude Jesus wants His disciples to have in this passage?

The disciples had gotten all caught up in what their hands had accomplished on that impact trip. Jesus is reminding them that their hands are empty unless He fills them.

And Jesus keeps filling them; He’s literally creating bread and fish by the way; He’s bringing baskets loads of pickled fish and barley bread into existence.

He is demonstrating that He is Lord of all creation. The apostle Paul will write in **Colossians 1: "For by Him all things were created . . ."**

Well, here's an example of His creative power.

**Luke** now tells us here in **verse 17:**

*And they all ate and were satisfied.*

*Luke 9:17a*

The word Luke uses here for satisfied is from *chortazo* (χορταζω) which means, "to fill up—literally—to fatten."

Rienecker/Rogers, p. 1

This was the Greek term used to describe the fattening of animals with feed. The rancher or farmer brought them into the barn or the corral and let them gorge on food until they could eat no more.

Adapted from R.C.H. Lenski, p. 507

That's why you take your kids today to Golden Corral—perfectly named by the way—to bring them into the corral to eat until they can eat no more.

Evidently, the Lord is okay with that, periodically, because He doesn't make just enough here, He makes enough for them to become completely full.

And the fact that these people are literally stuffed with bread and pickled fish is significant to this miracle.

Skeptics have suggested that this would have been impossible for Jesus to do; so, what really happened here was that this

crowd was so embarrassed by this little boy offering his lunch that they all took out their lunches and shared them with each other.

Luke demolishes that theory here in **verse 17:**

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

*Luke 9:17*

All the bread and the fish had come directly from the hands of Jesus.

And now you've got one basket of leftovers, for each of the 12 disciples. They get to eat too.

And every time they eat, they're reminded of their inadequacy and the Lord's sufficiency.

As Alexander McLaren wrote on this text 100 years ago, they will remember that "They always found His hands were full whenever they came back to Him with their hands empty."

Adapted from McLaren, quoted in Hughes, p. 333

This is serving others for Christ: He fills our hands, and we give it away, only to have our hands filled by Him all over again.

Did they learn the lesson of humility and service?

Well, when the apostle Peter comes to the end of his life and writes a couple of inspired letters, he doesn't list in his



letters all the powerful things he did: “I was the guy who healed a man who’d been lame from birth; I was the guy who spoke in a language I’d never learned; I was the first person to preach the opening sermon in church history, and it was so powerful, 3,000 people responded.”

No, instead, old Peter wrote to us and said, “***Clothe yourselves with humility ... for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.***”

Peter spoke of the glory of Christ – “***for to Him belongs all power—dominion—forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:5).***”

We don’t stand around talking about an apple or two that we shined up and sold for profit—if you did, good; that’s good initiative.

Just don’t forget the inheritance you received from the One who made you and who saved you.

The One you should want to talk about; the One who deserves all the credit and all the glory, and all the praise is Your Supplier—your Creator—your King.

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