

FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH

Luke 9:10-17

Intro: The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is recorded for us in all four Gospels: Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9, and John 6. The fact that it is found in all of the Gospels says enough about its importance. And it would seem that it was important not only because of the amazing nature of the miracle itself, but because of the lessons it held for our Lord's disciples.

The twelve had just returned to the Lord after engaging in a busy mission of, as Mark (6:13) tells us, not only of preaching, but of casting out demons and healing the sick. They had gone out in teams of two. When they returned, they reported to the Lord what they had done. It must have been a very encouraging time for all of the men whom the Lord had chosen and sent out. But it was also a very wearying experience. And so, as we learn from Mark also (6:31), the Lord told them to come away with Him where they could rest for a brief time. And so they got into a ship, according to Matthew and Mark and John, and went north a short distance to Tiberias.

However, they did not have long to rest because the people found out where they had gone, followed them by land, and the Lord found Himself busy again preaching and healing. This went on apparently for several hours, and finally the day was coming to a close and the disciples felt that the Lord and they had enough for one day. And so they told the Lord to tell the people to go away. The disciples knew that the people were without food, and that many of them would need to find a place to stay for the night.

At that point the Lord said to them, "Give ye them to eat." John recorded that the Lord spoke specifically to Philip, asking him what they should do. The Lord's question to him was, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (John 6:5).

Now there were several problems which the disciples were facing.

I. THE PROBLEMS FACING THE DISCIPLES.

First, there was a large crowd of people there. Luke doesn't mention the number, but Mark and John said that there were five thousand; Matthew said that to that number must be added the women and children. And so it is very likely that the number of people was closer to ten thousand than to five thousand. If the disciples had been prepared for them,

feeding a crowd that size would have been a gigantic task.

Second, they were in a desert place, and there was no place close by where they would have been able to buy food. And if they could have bought food, Philip said (John 6:7) that they only had two hundred pennies among them, which probably would have amounted to \$40 in our money in non-inflationary times. But whatever the exact amount may have been in terms of our money today, it was ridiculous even to think of giving everybody even a little with that small amount of money. So that obviously was not the solution.

Third, none of the disciples had any food with them. Andrew was the only one who knew anything about where they could get any food. He had found a young boy who had a lunch of five loaves and two fish. But after Andrew mentioned this, he hastened to add, perhaps with some embarrassment, "But what are these among so many?" (John 6:9).

And then let me mention a fourth complication. We have no evidence that the disciples with all of the miracles they had performed, were able to provide food for themselves. And, in addition, it was after this that the Lord fed the four thousand, and so up to this point the disciples had not seen the Lord feed such a crowd.

It is clear that the disciples were faced with a situation that was different from any that they had faced before, and when they considered all of the resources they knew about, they could see no answer. Let us look now at what the Lord did.

II. THE WORK OF THE LORD.

The Apostle John is the one who has told us two things about the Lord which are very important for us to remember:

- 1) This was meant to be a proving time for the disciples. This means that it was to be a testing time for them. The Lord wanted them to see how they would think in a time like this, and how they would act.
- 2) The Lord knew all of the time what He was going to do.

It is good for us to remember these things in all of our circumstances. The Lord is never uncertain as to how we will respond. He is all-wise and all-knowing. He never has to learn anything. But He wants us to learn all we can about ourselves so we will know how to trust Him in the days ahead. He never tempts us to sin, but sometimes we do sin because we have not learned what we need to know about trusting the Lord.

So we must not think of our trials as some kind of a trap that the Lord has set before us, but rather a new learning experience. He does not do these things for Himself, but for us. The Lord was training these men, and he did it, not by a classroom experience, but by a trial.

And so when they told Him what to do, He told them what to do. Notice:

III. THE LORD'S COMMANDS (Luke 9:13).

The first was this:

A. "Give ye them to eat."

This is what caused them to start to think about what they could do to feed the people. Where would they get the food? And if they could find food, how would they possibly buy it. This may have been what caused Andrew to look around to find out how much the people could provide for themselves. But that also proved to be hopeless.

The point that the Lord was making with them was that they did not have what it would take to feed the people. They did not have food. They did not have money to buy food. They were absolutely helpless, and it seemed that the Lord had asked them to do something which under those conditions they could not do.

And that was exactly the point. The disciples were in a situation where they could not possibly do what the Lord wanted them to do.

But then, after they got this far, the Lord gave them a second command:

B. "Make them sit down by fifties in a company."

They could do this, and they did. They got the people to do what the Lord wanted them to do.

Perhaps some of the disciples felt at this point that the Lord was going to do something special. But it is also possible that, while they did what the Lord wanted them to do, they were thinking, "What is the point in all of this? We can't feed the people; why should we make them think that we are going to feed them?"

However, if you think about this for a moment, you will realize that this was a test of their faith. Would they do something which seemed to have no meaning just because the

Lord told them to do it? We like to know what the Lord is doing with us. And we like to know before He does it. But He rarely deals with us that way. Our circumstances are so designed by the Lord that we are called upon to show that we trust the Lord even though we cannot possibly see how things are going to work out.

This is what it means to walk by faith. This is why we call such a thing as the Lord asked them to do as the obedience of faith. Faith does not just mean that we wait for God to do something; it means that we go ahead in obedience to His word, believing that He has a purpose for all that He says and that He knows what He is doing even though we may be completely in the dark.

So the disciples could not do one thing that the Lord told them to do, but they did the other -- and they did it! What happened then?

IV. THE LORD AT WORK (Luke 9:16a).

He took what they had, the five loaves and two fish. And then Luke tells us that He looked up! What was He doing? He was doing what, as far as we can tell, the disciples had not yet done: He was bringing the Father into the situation. How often we calculate things on the basis of what we have and/or what we can do, without thinking about our heavenly Father.

What did He do next?

"He blessed them." This simply means that He gave thanks for them. It wasn't enough, but He was thankful for what they had. This is especially significant with the Lord because we know that He could have created food there on the spot if that had been necessary. But since there was some food, He stated with that, and gave thanks to the heavenly Father. You see, it was God Who prompted just one mother out of all of the people who were there to prepare a lunch for her little boy that morning. And our Lord was thankful for that.

Then what happened?

The Lord started to break up those loaves and those fish, and as He broke off a part of a loaf, it became another loaf already cooked and ready to eat. And as He began to divide the fish, each part of a fish became a full fish, cooked and ready to eat. And He continued to give these to His disciples as long as there was any need. What an amazing sight this must of have been!

But now I want you to notice how everything turned out:

V. THE WORK OF THE DISCIPLES (Luke 9:16b, 17).

Do you remember that the Lord had told them, "Give ye them to eat"? But they couldn't because they didn't have any food to give. But now we see two wonderful things:

A. The disciples did give them food to eat.

The Lord did not give the food directly to the people, but He gave it to the disciples, and they gave it to the people. He made it possible for them to do what He told them to do!

How far did the food go?

B. Two things need to be said here.

1. Everybody ate until they were full.

That is a simple thing to say, but think of the amazing amount of food that it would take to feed 5,000 men, plus their wives and their children. Nobody went away even wishing that they could have more.

But there is something else that is very important.

2. There were exactly twelve baskets full left over.

I think that you can put together twelve disciples and twelve baskets. I doubt if anybody ate a whole basket of food, but that is what each disciple had. And so we learn the simple lesson that the one whom the Lord uses always gets greater blessings than those to whom he ministers.

Concl: None of us is an apostle (because that is what these men became). And we do not have the privilege of seeing the Lord, and being with the Lord like they did. But there are principles here which we need to learn because we, too, have our tests. And we need to remember that they are learning experiences for us as they were for the twelve disciples. They had experienced great blessing in their ministry, but there was more for them to learn. And that is what the Lord was concerned about. We may not have the answers, but the Lord always does.

I have called my message tonight, Five Loaves and Two Fish. In the future when you read this story, or even think about this event in the life of our Lord, let the Five Loaves and Two Fish remind you of two things:

1) Your insufficiency and mine.

2) The all-sufficiency of our Lord.

And then let us learn to say, as the Apostle Paul learned to say, "Our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5).

As long as we think that we are sufficient, we will fail. But when we trust the Lord, believing that even though we don't know what to do, but He does, then there can be and will be blessing.

The world talks about feeling good about ourselves. That is sin. If you want to feel good about anyone, feel good about the Lord. He never fails, and He is continually working in our circumstances to teach us that by His grace we can do all that He intends for us to do.