



Potomac Hills
Community Church, PCA
RELEVANT • RELATIONAL • REAL

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The Power for Provision

“Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke
Luke 9:10-17

INTRODUCTION: *Miracle or Moral??*¹

We have seen a number of miracles so far in Luke’s Gospel.
Jesus has healed a leper, ... a crippled man, ... a bleeding woman.
He has brought life to the dead and dying.
He’s cast out demons and quieted the wind and the waves.

And now we’ve come to the culmination of this part of His ministry ... to a miracle that draws together everything Jesus has done so far. Immediately afterwards comes Peter’s great confession of faith and then the Transfiguration. From there He will leave Galilee and head for Jerusalem and ultimately to the cross.

This miracle in Luke 9, commonly called the Feeding of the 5,000, is exceptional in how it reveals Jesus identity as the Son of God and Savior of Sinners and seems to have a major impact in leading Peter to make his profession of faith. In the last verse we read, verse 9, King Herod asks, ***“so who is this man about whom I hear such strange stories?”***

Immediately following this passage comes Peter’s answer in verse 20, ***“Then He asked them, “Who do you say I am?” Peter replied, “You are the Messiah sent from God!”***”

The significance of this miracle becomes all the greater when you realize that this is the **only** miracle Jesus performs that appears in all four gospels.

Another thing that makes this a great miracle is how it confounds the liberal theologians trying to deny it. Folks like those in the Jesus Seminar, who are

¹ Some parts of this message have been adapted from Mighty to Save by Richard Phillips, pages 139-155.

wasting their lives trying to find the historical Jesus behind the Biblical record, rather than accepting the Gospels as **the** record of the historical Jesus, have a hard time with this one.

They can only deal with this miracle by reinterpreting it as good morals rather than a miracle. Their argument goes something like this: Jesus didn't feed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. No, his example of faith inspired others to break out the food they had with them all along and share it with others. It's a story about generosity, not divine multiplication. And it calls us to share with others. It's not about believing in Jesus but giving to the food bank.

Anyway, that's what they say.

But there are a few problems with their view.

First, it appears in all four of the Gospels and none of them notice or record anything like this. All of them – and we have four independent sources, two of whom were eyewitnesses – seem to think it was a genuine miracle.

Second, remember that three of the four Gospels were written when a great number of eyewitnesses were still living. Only the Gospel of John was written much later. So obviously Matthew, Mark, and Luke felt comfortable making the claim the Jesus performed this miracle just as they said, knowing that there were lots of people around who could confirm or deny what they wrote. Either all four were lying in the face of all these eyewitnesses or this was in fact the miracle they describe.

Finally, the liberal version wouldn't bring about any of the effects the Gospel writers tie to this miracle. Luke directly links this to Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ sent from God. John connects this miracle to the manna God provided during the Exodus and to Jesus' claim that now He is the "Bread of Life." Both of which are critical to the flow of these accounts of Christ's life ... so much so that if they were changed we wind up with a different Jesus and a different gospel. So it's not just a nice morality play ... it's a miracle by the Son of God and Savior of Sinners.

Let's read it ...

Luke 9:10-17, *"When the apostles returned, they told Jesus everything they had done. Then He slipped quietly away with them toward the town of Bethsaida. [11] But the crowds found out where He was going, and they followed Him. And He welcomed them, teaching them about the Kingdom of God and curing those who were ill. [12] Late in the afternoon the twelve disciples came to Him and said, "Send the crowds away to the nearby villages and farms, so they can find food and lodging for the night. There is nothing to eat here in this deserted place."*

[13] But Jesus said, "You feed them."

"Impossible!" they protested. "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish. Or are you expecting us to go and buy enough food for this whole crowd?" [14]

For there were about five thousand men there.

*"Just tell them to sit down on the ground in groups of about fifty each," Jesus replied. [15] So the people all sat down. [16] **Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and asked God's blessing on the food. Breaking the loaves into pieces, He kept giving the bread and fish to the disciples to give to the people. [17] They all ate as much as they wanted, and they picked up twelve baskets of leftovers!**"*

Now if this passage did **nothing** but confound liberal theologians it would glorify God and serve a great purpose. But it has much else to tell us about what was happening and who Jesus was and what He was doing.

We start with verses ...

v. 10-11: THERE'S EXHAUSTION²

Luke's brief introduction to the context of the miracle in verses 10-11 gives us little more than the basic facts. Mark's account is more graphic, telling us that when the disciples returned from their preaching mission, in **Mark 6:30-31**, "*The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told Him all they had done and what they had taught. Then Jesus said, "Let's get away from the crowds for a while and rest." There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and His apostles didn't even have time to eat.*"

Evidently, by the time the disciples finished telling Jesus what happened, they all were getting "**peopled to death**" by the growing crowds.

The press on them was so great they couldn't even break away to eat.

So Jesus prescribes a retreat on the north side of the lake. Luke tells us they withdrew to Bethsaida, at the top of the lake where the Jordan River empties into the Sea of Galilee. It's about 4 miles to Bethsaida by boat and about 8 miles by foot. So when the people saw the disciples set sail for Bethsaida, the young and the strong began to charge north along the lake. Hundreds more from the lakeside villages probably joined them, calling out to their friends to come along, so finally thousands converged on the apostle's retreat site in noisy, jostling expectation.

Mark says in **Mark 6:33**, "*But many people saw them leaving, and people from many towns ran ahead along the shore and met them as they landed.*"

So much for time away. Kent Hughes says there might as well have been a sign there that said, "Welcome to Church Camp: Activities from dawn to dusk."

The disciples are exhausted. They just want to get away and relax.

The people are tired. They just came eight miles to see Jesus.

There's a whole lot of people huffing and puffing when Jesus gets out of the boat. I think the disciples just wanted Jesus to send them away.

² Several parts of this exposition have been adapted from Preaching the Word: Luke, Vol. 1 by R. Kent Hughes, pages 329-335.

That's probably what I would have wanted.

But Luke tells us that Jesus "*welcomed them, teaching them about the Kingdom of God and curing those who were ill.*"

The Greek words used here suggests that Jesus preached at great length on the same Kingdom theme He told the Apostles to preach on. He would tell them about the Sovereign reign of God and call them to Kingdom living, and Kingdom ethics, and the need to live by faith and repentance. He would tell them that the Kingdom was present among them and invite them to enter the Kingdom and then He performed healing miracles to confirm what He had said.

Everyone was tired. But Jesus kept going and the crowd soaked it up.

So much so that Luke says they all were there until late in the afternoon.

And everyone was getting hungry.

And that brings us to the fact that ...

v. 12: THERE'S NEEDS

Jesus has been preaching and healing for hours. Mark and John tell us that it was spring, probably about mid-April, and the sun sets about 6:00 pm at that time of year in Palestine. Since it's late in the afternoon, and people are getting hungry, it's perhaps about 5:00 pm now and so the disciples suggest sending the people away to find someplace to eat.

Now the disciples are telling Jesus what to do.

This seems a little out of place. They have been with Him for over a year now. They've seen all the miracles. They've heard all the teaching. Regardless of the difficulty of the situation, they've never seen Him unable to meet the need.

Any need.

And yet they don't think about what Jesus may be able to do, or may want to do in this situation. They see its impossibility and tell Him to send everyone home.

How can they do this?

Because they're a lot like us.

How often do we remain oblivious to what Christ can do or what Christ may want? He has provided for us over and over again, and yet so many times, we're simply too dull to think He might do it again. His hand meets our needs in some unexpected way, and then the next time we're in a tight spot, we try to tell God what He needs to do here, and don't think how He is already adequate for us and our needs right now.

And essentially that's what the disciples do.

But Jesus has other plans.

Look at verses ...

v. 13-16: THERE'S PROVISION

Jesus has now set up the disciples with His calculated reply, "*You feed them.*" It is an emphatic command.

And they have an emphatic reply ... ***“Impossible!”***

“Jesus, You can’t be serious. We don’t have enough food. We don’t have enough money to buy food. And there isn’t any place here to buy food even if we could. Can’t do it. Impossible.”

And you know something? They were right.

They couldn’t do it.

Jesus instructions are **meant** to point out their inability and helplessness.

He asked them to do something, that on **their own power**, they couldn’t do.

There is some real insight here as to how God seeks to bring us to a place of spiritual growth. First, we have to admit our own inadequacy. We have to admit our own inability. Only when we say, “We’re not able to do this,” are we ready for Him to work through us.

Our inadequacy leads to His sufficiency.

There are two Old Testament allusions in this incident, both of which anyone raised in the synagogue would have known about.

The first reference is to **2 Kings 4:42-44** where the prophet Elisha commanded his servant to feed 100 men with 20 loaves of bread. There it says, *“One day a man from Baal-shalishah brought the man of God a sack of fresh grain and twenty loaves of barley bread made from the first grain of his harvest. Elisha said, “Give it to the group of prophets so they can eat.” [43] “What?” his servant exclaimed. “Feed one hundred people with only this?” But Elisha repeated, “Give it to the group of prophets so they can eat, for the Lord says there will be plenty for all. There will even be some left over!” [44] **And sure enough, there was plenty for all and some left over, just as the Lord had promised.**”*

Now Jesus is doing the same thing that the prophet Elisha attributed to God in 2 Kings. Those who recognized it would immediately know that this is something only God can do. And Jesus was now doing something **only God can do**. He is the Provider.

The second Old Testament reference is when God provided “manna ... bread from heaven” in Exodus 16. This is especially made clear in John’s account in John 6 where the feeding of the 5,000 is immediately followed by Jesus’ teaching.

John 6:29-35, *“Jesus told them, “This is what God wants you to do: Believe in the One He has sent.”*

[30] They replied, “You must show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in You. What will You do for us? [31] After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! As the Scriptures say, ‘Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ ”

*[32] Jesus said, “I assure you, Moses didn’t give them bread from heaven. My Father did. **And now He offers you the true bread from heaven.** [33] The true*

bread of God is the One who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

[34] *"Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day of our lives."*

[35] ***Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry again. Those who believe in Me will never thirst."***

Jesus is telling them, "Look, God gives the real bread from heaven and I'm that bread." He's claiming to be God. He's greater than Elisha. He's greater than Moses. He is the provider. He doesn't merely give the bread from heaven. He **IS** the bread from heaven.

Jesus is standing there ... holding this small amount of food in front of the huge number of people. And He asks God's blessing on it. Probably the traditional Jewish blessing which goes, "Blessed be You, O Lord our God, King of the world, who causes bread to come forth from the earth."

This would be followed by a thunderous 5,000 voice "Amen."

And then it says, "*Breaking the loaves into pieces, He kept giving the bread and fish to the disciples to give to the people.*"

Jesus kept producing bread and giving it to the twelve disciples to give to the people. He is creating more food as He goes.

Do you understand the flow of power we've seen in Luke so far?

In Luke 8:22-25, we've seen that Jesus is the **Lord of nature**, so that the raging sea calms on His command.

In Luke 8:26-39, we've seen that Jesus is the **Lord of the supernatural**, so that demons are cast out on His command.

In Luke 8:40-48, we've seen that Jesus is the **Lord of life**, so that a woman's health is restored at His touch.

In Luke 8:49-56, we've seen that Jesus is the **Lord over death**, so that a young girl is raised to life on His command.

Now He's the **Lord of creation** as bread flows from the one who is bread.

All of this, then, answers the question of King Herod in verse 9, "Who is this man?"

And finally, in verse 17, we see that ...

v. 17: THERE'S SATISFACTION

It says, "*They all ate as much as they wanted, and they picked up twelve baskets of leftovers!*" The NIV says, "*They all ate and were satisfied ...*"

Jesus provided more than enough for 5,000 men, plus woman and children. And not just enough to keep them alive or get them home, but enough so that they were **satisfied**.

The grand point of all of this is the utter sufficiency of Christ for any and all needs that may come our way.

One side note ...

Who said this was "impossible?" The disciples.

How many disciples were there? 12

How many baskets of food were left over? 12

Who was holding those baskets of food? The disciples.

Be very **careful** before you say, “impossible,” to the Sovereign God of the universe. You may be left holding a basket that says otherwise.

The point of this passage is **not** that Jesus does cool miracles.

The point of this passage is for us to know that ...

v. 10-17: THERE’S A SAVIOR

One of the things we want to look for when studying the Bible is what does this passage tell us about God. This particular passage not only tells us that Jesus is God, but also shows us what God is like. Jesus would later say in **John 14:9**, “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!*”

And in this miracle He reveals several facets of God’s character.

We see His compassion as He cared for the needs and troubles and illnesses and hunger of many people.

We see His zeal for God’s people, rousing Himself from exhaustion in order to meet both their spiritual and physical needs.

When we compare Him with King Herod in the preceding passage, we note that He didn’t eat from silver platters, but ate plain bread with common folk.

We’re reminded that He once said, **Matthew 20:28**, “*For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give My life as a ransom for many.*”

Finally, and most obviously, Jesus demonstrates the power of God. He is so mighty that no need is too difficult for Him to meet.

Compassionate, zealous to serve, humble of heart, mighty in power – that is the Lord and Savior revealed to us in this passage.

CONCLUSION: *Food For Our Souls*³

It’s easy to read about all these miracles and think that miracles are simply the currency of heaven. And the feeding of the 5,000 was just a little loose change spilling from a hole in its pocket.

Remember that Jesus had given Himself to the people all day long.

Both He and the disciples need to get away and rest.

But the people were there ... waiting.

And He had compassion on them.

They seemed to Him like sheep without a shepherd.

Without someone to lead them into the serene landscape of faith with its green pastures and still waters.

Without someone to restore their souls.

³ Adapted from Moments with the Savior by Ken Gire, pages 168-171.

Without someone to guide them down the right paths or walk with them through the dark valleys.

The disciples said, "Send them away to find food."

But Jesus is too good a shepherd to do that.

He looks at the disciples and tests their faith.

He says, "**You feed them.**"

Philip whips out his Palm Pilot, hits calculator, does some quick figures, and says, "Impossible. Can't be done. We don't have enough money or food."

Impossible?

Not to the One who is the Word who was in the beginning with God.

Not to the One who is the Word who was God, coming down from heaven to become flesh and dwell among us.

Not to the One who knit the leadership of the church out of coarse fishermen and tax collectors.

Not to the One who got wine from water, a coin from a fish, and sight from blind eyes.

Not to the One who took a man covered with spots and made him clean.

What the disciples don't see is that impossible situations are not solved by how much we have in our baskets or our banks.

Impossible situations are solved by miracles.

Miracles come from Jesus.

And that's where the disciples had to go to get bread.

And so they did ... and He did ... and everyone ate.

It was an incredible moment with the One who said, "I am the Bread of Life." And John tells us that they wanted to make Him King.

But just as the Savior refused the crown offered to Him by Satan in the wilderness, so He refuses the one offered now.

Because He knows that the way to the throne is not over the red carpet of the tempter or on the shoulders of supporters.

The way to the throne is up a long stony path to a hill called Calvary.

And it would be there that the bread of life would be broken ... so that people hungry for forgiveness could take and eat.

And the Bible says those who eat **that** bread would be satisfied.

Because Jesus said, "***No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry again. Those who believe in Me will never thirst.***"

And **that** is amazing grace.

And that's the message that goes everywhere and to everyone.

And that's why He is willing and able to save **you**, no matter what your condition is or where you're found.

At the end of John's Gospel it says, **John 20:31**, "*But these are written so*

that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him you will have life.”

The only question is whether or not you will **believe** in Him.

Because Luke wants us to see that the Jesus story is not only about Him, but also about us.

These texts **reveal** God at work; and show us how God **reveals His power** in order to call people whose souls are empty and hungry to “Come, be My disciple.”

God takes people who are “outsiders,” **and who can’t get in on their own**, and makes them “insiders” ... people who are involved **in a relationship** with the God of the universe. People who are called to live a life that looks to God because He has **poured out His grace** on those of us who realize that, apart from Christ, we are **hungry for the bread of life**, and **we are thirsty for living water**, and that we’ve done nothing to deserve either.

And that’s **grace**, because we’re getting what we don’t deserve.

Luke brings us that same essential message of grace over and over again.

We see it in Jesus’ teaching.

We see it in Jesus’ healing.

We see it when He casts out demons.

We see it with lepers and paralytics.

We see it when He calls undeserving people.

We see it when He teaches the Twelve.

We see it with a Roman Centurion and a brokenhearted widow.

We see it with a doubting prophet at the end of his life.

We see it with a sinful woman and a self-righteous Pharisee.

We see it when He instills faith into weak and scared disciples.

We see it with a demon-possessed guy who gets clothed and sane.

We see it with a rich man and a poor woman who both have faith in Christ.

We see it in the message Jesus tells us to take to the people.

And now we see it in the eyes of 5,000 well-fed people and 12 wide-eyed disciples.

It’s all of grace from beginning to end ... that’s the message.

Luke tells the story of how **Jesus revealed that grace**, died to provide it, rose again to bestow it, and will return to establish its presence over all of creation. The church **must show what such grace looks like** ... starting by bringing that grace to those among us who are hungry and thirsty, and who, more than anything, want to be satisfied.

And all who agree said, “Amen.”