

Feeding the 5,000

Luke 9:1–17 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: This has been a blessed year at First Baptist Church. We have experienced record attendance, record baptisms, and record giving. In fact, we achieved our budget for 2023 back in October.

- Since our budget has been met, we decided to take the last offering of the year on Christmas Eve and give it entirely toward debt reduction.
- BUT THEN, as of today, you have given so much that I am pleased to announce that the building is completely paid for. [Applause]
- So, instead of giving that final offering to debt reduction - as a way of showing our appreciation to God's goodness toward our congregation - we will give the entire offering on Dec. 24th to support foreign missionaries around the world through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. [Applause]

How did it happen? How were we able to pay over 8 million dollars in the course of a year above and beyond our regular ministry needs? Well, the text before us today helps us to understand.

CONTEXT: This text has one of the most phenomenal miracles in the life of our Lord - the feeding of 5,000 with a little boy's sack lunch. It is the only miracle recorded in all 4 of the Gospel accounts - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. That in itself is significant.

This miracle was both incredible and instructive.

- You see, bread in the ancient world was the **primary source of life**.
- It was also the **center of the community** - it meant something to break bread with someone. That is why Jesus was so criticized for eating with sinners.
- Bread was also a **major part of worship** - So when you went to the temple to worship, you would always smell the aroma of freshly baked bread, 12 loaves, one for each tribe of Israel. It would be placed before the Lord on the Table of Shewbread.
- Ultimately, it was a permanent parable. Jesus would say after performing this miracle, **"I am the bread of life."** I am the source of life, I am the center of community, and I am the object of your worship.

With that in mind, look with me at...

TEXT: Luke 9:1–17 (ESV)

¹ And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

The verb translated “sent out” is *apostellō*, often used for an official, authorized mission. This is where they go from being disciples to being apostles.

Mark tells us they were sent out two by two. This was beneficial for many reasons. One, there was moral support; two, there was accountability...there was the idea that at least two witnesses confirmed every fact.

He tells them to travel light...look at verse 3.

³ And he said to them, “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. ⁴ And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. ⁵ And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” ⁶ And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

Here, Jesus tells them to go out, trusting God and people to provide for them. **Count on the hospitality of Israel.** Do not take a lot of provisions.

Later on, in **Luke 22**, Jesus instructs them to take plenty of provisions, take a moneybag, and arm themselves with weapons. This is a good reminder that different missions have different contexts, and there is more than one way to do ministry.

ILLUSTRATION: Next month, we will be launching our Central Nassau campus. Pastor Josh will be leading that campus. They will do some things differently than we will because their context is different. That is to be expected.

In verse 7, Luke takes a brief aside; if this were television, the screen would fade to black and open to a scene in Herod’s palace.

⁷ 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, ⁸ by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. ⁹ Herod said, “John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?” And he sought to see him.

This is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. One wonders if the rumors about this miracle worker reminded him of his father’s slaughter of the innocent children of Bethlehem. Could this be the one the Magi had sought? Could this be the King?

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. ¹¹ 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.

John’s account tells us that the **Passover was near**. Large crowds were making their way to the Holy Land to celebrate the Passover, so this explains why so many people were free to follow Jesus across the countryside. Thousands were following Him.

The sun was setting; the night was coming; stomachs were growling because they hadn't eaten.

- John tells us that the men alone numbered 5,000.
- Matthew tells us that there were also women and children.
- Bible scholars tell us there were probably also 5000 women. If there were 5,000 men and 5,000 women, there would be at least 100,000 kids somewhere. Actually, scholars conservatively estimate that, at a minimum, the crowd numbered somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 people.

12 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."

John's account tells us that the disciples said this in response to a question Jesus had raised to test them.

They had witnessed Jesus:

- Calm the raging storm
- Cast out a legion of demons
- Heal the sick
- Even raise the dead
- He had even shared His power with them so they could do much of what He had done.

Now, He tests them by saying - how can we feed these people? Their answer: Each man for himself. Let them take a hike to the nearby villages and figure it out. Remember, they had just returned from a mission that required them to depend on the hospitality of strangers. Now, they weren't very hospitable in their response.

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

Now, I don't mean to be judgmental. But wouldn't you think they would take a stab at it? Jesus has proven His power time and again. Now, He commands them to feed this multitude miraculously. Here is what I think: If any disciple, Peter, Phillip, James, John, Andrew, any of them... had just said, "Ok, Lord, here goes...", I think that disciple would have performed this miracle. But what do they do? They begin to do the math and miss the opportunity.

13b. They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish —unless we are to go and buy food for all these people."

John tells us that a young boy, a lad, offered the five loaves and two fish. Who was he? Where was he from? Who were his parents? We don't know. The BIBLE tells us that he is a child. Have you ever noticed how important children were to Jesus?

Mark 10:13–16 (ESV)

13 And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 15 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” 16 And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Think about it - Jesus said that to enter Heaven, the little kids don't have to become like adults, but the adults have to become like the little kids.

Matthew 21:15–16 (ESV)

15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, 16 and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, “ ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise’?”

Jesus loved kids.

ILLUSTRATION: I read recently about a little boy who begged his dad, who was a very busy businessman, to take him fishing. Finally, the father took his son out and spent the entire day with his son on the lake. That night the boy wrote in his diary; “today I spent the entire day with Dad; it was the greatest day of my life”.

Years later the boy's father passed away. Now a grown man, the son was going through his father's belongings and came across his journals. He found the one for the day they went fishing, got it out and looked up what his dad wrote. He wrote; “Spent the whole day with my son, an entire day wasted, nothing accomplished”.

TIME INVESTED IN A CHILD IS NEVER WASTED.

We are one generation away from losing the Gospel in the USA. It has already happened in Europe. Places where the Gospel torch once burned bright is now completely secular and godless.

If I were Satan, I wouldn't worry so much about the adults. I would give my full attention to shutting down ministry to children. Make people too busy or too self-absorbed to volunteer for nursery, VBS, kid's church...convince parents that sports are much more important than youth group. Do that for a decade or two, and it's over.

For whatever else the disciples did wrong on this occasion - they recognized that Jesus might want to use this little boy, so they brought him to the Master.

- We are told in John's account that this boy had **Five Barley Loaves** - These were wafers that were flat, hard, and brittle, about the size of a soft taco shell. It was made from barley, not wheat. It was the bread of poor people and livestock.
- This boy had **Two Fish** - The word for fish refers to a little pickled fish, much like a sardine. So, please don't get the idea that he had a couple of loaves of Sunbeam bread and two 30-pound red snappers. He had about two fish tacos.

The disciples began to do the math...what is 20,000 divided by five crackers and two sardines?

- **Phillip** speaks up in John's account -: "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." Now, Phillip had been with Jesus the longest; therefore, he should have ACED this test. He had seen all the miracles (water into wine, the nobleman's son, the paralytic).
- **Andrew** chimes in according to John's account - "What are these among so many?"
- Phillip was concerned about **SUPPLY** - we only have a sack lunch.
- Andrew is concerned about **DEMAND** - what are these among so many?

How do you think the little boy felt? He was trying to help! Here were these two apostles who should have known better throwing water on his idea.

There tend to be two types of people in every Church

1. Fire Starters Encouragers Eagles
2. Fire Fighters Discouragers Turkeys

Every church has a few people with the spiritual gift of criticism. I wouldn't ask those kinds of people. I wouldn't ask those people *to lead in silent prayer. Negativity spreads!*

- Phillip was looking at **Supply**
- Andrew was looking at **Demand**
- This little BOY was looking at **Jesus** - he said, *I don't know what you can do with this lunch of mine, but it is yours.*

¹⁴ For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵ And they did so, and had them all sit down.

Incidentally, remember these people are hungry; they are about to faint, another gospel writer said. How long did it take to organize 20,000 people into groups of 50? This is important - before the miracle happened, they had to get some things in order. Before the miracle happened, they had to organize in such a way that they could facilitate the miracle.

ILLUSTRATION: Five or six years ago, we sensed God impressing upon us to build our technological infrastructure. At the time, the staff would wait until seventy percent of our light bulbs were shot before they would rent a lift to replace them. It would get so dark in here during the service. People thought we were trying to be cool and contemporary.

We had them install all LED lights that we could control the colors on. At the time, we had one little bitty camera, and a staff member would sit on the second row and try to capture video of our service. We went and bought three of the nicest cameras on the market.

This time next month, we will launch a second campus - the sermons here will be simulcast to that location. One day that campus will likely be larger than this campus. But we couldn't start that campus if we hadn't organized for it years earlier.

We have organizations inviting us to go on radio and television nationwide through our Maximum Life ministry. That is possible now because we built the infrastructure to support it.

Listen, this is not just something that happens one day a week on this campus - but you are part of a ministry currently being heard daily across Florida. The impact of this church will soon be felt nationally, then eventually around the world.

BUT, when we asked God to do it, He said, "Organize for it." If you don't organize for it, you wouldn't be able to handle it if He did do it.

- Some of you are praying for God to get you out of debt, but you've never done a budget. You have no plan. You aren't even sure how much debt you have. Here is the truth - if He gave you enough to get out of debt today, you'd go right back in.
- Some of you are praying for a better job, but you aren't training for a better job, so if he gave you what you are asking for, you'd lose the job as soon as they figure out you don't know what you are doing.

He organized the people...

¹⁶ 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.

The text doesn't tell us exactly how it happened:

- Did they bow their head to pray, and food appeared when they opened their eyes?
- Was it like the widow's oil in 2 Kings 4? That every time they reached back in the container, there was more bread and fish?

We don't know, we do know that...

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

This lad gave Jesus what he had - and Jesus blessed a multitude with it.

One of my favorite lines in a gospel song says this, *"If a cup of water I put in your hand, a cup of water is all that I demand."*

ILLUSTRATION: My father passed away about seven years ago. My parents had lived with us for the last few years of his life. A few weeks went by after Dad passed, and my mother came in one day. She said, "How would you feel if I moved out and got my own place?". I said, "Well, you are a grown woman, so do what you want, but that's entirely unnecessary." She replied, "Well, I made an offer on a house today". I wondered why she asked in the first place.

Julie and I looked at each other and said, "What was our life plan before all of this happened"?

I'm sure everyone feels this way, but we had believed since our honeymoon that God was calling us to live on the coast of Florida. So, I began to look for churches on the coast that needed a pastor. There was this church and one in Sarasota. I applied to both churches, and both wanted to interview me. We got to the 4th quarter of interviews, and I was the final candidate for both churches. I kept hoping one would rule me out and make my decision easier. I will never forget Suellen Garner telling me, "It's time to pick a team." We are focusing on one pastor at a time, and you need to focus on one church at a time. We agreed to move forward with FBC.

They were very open, honest, and straightforward about the state of the church. The church had gone into 12 million dollars in debt and struggled to make payroll. They asked if I was concerned about the debt. I told them, "Well, it's like Willie Nelson told the IRS; it doesn't sound like much if you say it fast."

They voted me in as Pastor. On my first day on the job, the Executive Pastor resigned. I thought, "Dear Lord, what have I gotten into"? Then, one day, Robin, our financial secretary, came in and said, "You aren't going to believe this, but a \$20,000 check came in today". The next week, the same thing; the next week, the same thing.

After a while, I had to ask, "Who is giving that kind of money"? She told me none of us knew the family. But I felt like someone needed to say "thank you" on behalf of the church. Our Executive Pastor was gone, and I was the only one who could do it. So I did; I wrote a letter that said, "Sir, at the risk of violating the privacy of your gift, I wanted to say thank you for meeting a real need in the life of our church." He was gracious and continued to bless this church greatly.

Then, one day, I asked this man how he came to know Jesus. He said, "I came to Christ during a James Robinson crusade." What happened next was one of the most surreal experiences in my life. In my spirit, the Lord reminded me of my Grandmother, who had 12 kids and was dirt poor her entire life....when she passed away, we were cleaning her home and discovered that she had been sending checks to a TV preacher for years. It wasn't much, but it was a lot to her - \$10, \$15, at a time... about the same as a sack lunch.

Guess who the TV preacher was...James Robinson. Our God is a multiplying God. I don't know what God is leading you to give, but listen to me - trust Him with what you have and leave the results up to Him.