

LUKE

“More than a Meal”

Luke 9:10-17

Sunday, May 13, 2018 (After Ascension Day, Mother’s Day)

By David A. Ritchie

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. 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.” ¹³ But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” 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. 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. ¹⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.¹

Heavenly Father, you said ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ May your Spirit today give us hearts that would feast on and savor your Word, so that, by your Word, you would give us life. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus, AMEN.

Introduction

Today is Mother’s Day.

When I think of my mother, who I love so much, I think about how much of our relationship has taken place in her kitchen. It is in this kitchen that I have shared some of the deepest conversations that I’ve ever had with my mom. It is in this kitchen that I have had mom laugh and cry and sometimes enraged. But it has all been in the kitchen, as my mom pours over a meal that she is creating for the family.

I have begun to see my mom’s kitchen is more than a room. It is her artist’s studio, where she doesn’t just make meals; she designs them and sculpts them like Michelangelo and his famous David statue.

And, at least in my adult life, the meal that my mom puts the most intentionality and effort is our family feast after church on Sundays. Early in the week, she plans for it. She might even call a family member or two to run her ideas by. On Saturday, she goes to the store to purchase the fresh produce and ingredients and then comes home to prep everything for the next day. She will usually wake up before dawn on Sunday to put things in the oven, come to the early service at Redeemer, and then return home to finalize everything before the invading hoards of grandchildren arrive.

She does this week after week, thinking and preparing for hours just for a moment that comes and

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 9:10–17.

goes. But the reason she does this is that this Sunday feast has never been just a way to transmit food into the bellies of her family.

This Sunday meal is her love language. It is her way to cultivate an environment for three generations of her family to love one another, to share rich conversation, to see the grandkids laugh and play and grow up, to enjoy the culmination and harvest of decades of care and sacrificial service as a mother that has enabled all of this life to exist.

It has always been more than a meal.

And if you think about it, so many of our meals are more than a meal. In December of 2007, I went to eat a meal at the Cheesecake Factory in Columbus, Ohio. But was more than a meal. It was the first meal I ever shared with a woman named Kate Lacey, who I would marry less than a year later.

A first date, a birthday party for a child, a meal before a funeral, our meals are often laden with meaning.

This is also true of the meals of Jesus, especially in the Gospel According to Luke. It was during a meal at Levi-Matthew the tax-collector's house that Jesus showed that he has come to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Lk. 5:27-32). It was during a meal at Simon the Pharisees house that Jesus showed that the one who is forgiven much loves much (Lk. 7:36-50). In Jesus's ministry, as well as throughout the history of the church, the kingdom of God has often advanced over the sharing of food.

And here in the wilderness outside the fishing village of Bethsaida, Luke will show us one of the most famous meals of Jesus – *the feeding of the 5000*.

Now, something you want to know when you're reading the Bible is this: whenever the Bible repeats something, God is saying something big. And this miracle is the only miracle of Jesus's ministry that is recorded in all four gospel accounts (Mt. 14:13; Mk. 6:30; Jn. 6:1).²

This is more than a meal. So for the rest of our time, I want to delve into the various layers of meaning in this text, by looking at this text from three different perspectives: **1.) The Human Perspective, 2.) The Biblical Perspective, and finally, the 3.) Eternal Perspective.**

Exposition

1.) A Human Perspective.

Let's go back to 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"** (Luke 9:10, ESV).

The twelve apostles have returned from their first mission. Two-by-two, they have been empowered with miraculous power by Jesus to proclaim the kingdom of God throughout the region of Galilee. This is their victory lap. They are regrouping to high five, celebrate, and tell stories of the great feats they have accomplished. They understandably want a well-earned vacation and retreat to recharge. So they go to the mountainside wilderness area outside of the town of Bethsaida to sit around the campfire and rejoice in the work God has done in and through them.

² Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896), 242.

Then, an interruption: ***“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”*** (Luke 9:11, ESV).

Vacation is over. It’s time for more ministry, more work.

But, it is in the context of interruption that Jesus decides to move in a miraculous way. This is becoming a habit for Jesus. The paralyzed man lowered through the roof of a cramped home where Jesus was teaching (Lk. 5:17-26); the woman with the issue of blood pressing through the crowded streets to touch the hem of Jesus’s robe (Lk. 8:40-56); Jesus is a sovereign savior who finds opportunity for the miraculous in the unexpected and unwelcome intrusions of life.

Verse 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’*** (Luke 9:12, ESV).

The crowds who have spent the day feasting on the words of Christ are now physically hungry. They are in need. They are potentially exposed and at risk in the open. And the Dairy Queen in the small town of Bethsaida is not equipped to handle the order that the disciples want to send their way.

Even though the disciples have witnessed the Jesus do the miraculous and even they have accomplished the miraculous in Jesus’s power, their first temptation is to think of this situation in purely this-worldly terms.

I am a Christian and a pastor, but I must confess that I too often feel this way too. It is so easy to look at life’s interruptions as unwelcome intrusions, rather than a divine invitation to expect the miraculous.

I have witnessed miracles, but we live in a secular age wherein our imaginations are formed to believe that our existence is nothing more than matter in motion. Even for the religious, our belief is haunted by doubt. We suffer from spiritual amnesia. We forget the faithfulness of God. And we often fail even to recognize the possibility for God to move among us.

But the people of God are not secularists, who believe there is nothing more than the material world around us. We are not deists, who believe in a God, but only if he is a distant and untouchable God. We are a people who are called by the gospel reorient our hearts to expect and experience the power of a God who is very much involved in creation; who desires to move in and among us.

And Jesus will move in miraculous power, but now there is a slight change in the way Jesus will now operate in his ministry. He now desires to do so in concert and conjunction with his people. ***“But he said to them, ‘You give them something to eat.’ They said, ‘We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.’ For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, ‘Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.’ And they did so, and had them all sit down”*** (Luke 9:13–15, ESV).

The apostles scramble for ideas. The boss has just asked them to do something that he normally does, and now he is watching their every move. Another gospel account tells us that they essentially steal a little boy’s lunchbox (see Jn. 6:9) only to find a whopping five loaves of bread and two fish. They do not have enough to do the job. What they do have is ludicrously insufficient. But he takes what they do have, and he makes it enough: ***“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. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.”*** (Luke 9:16–17, ESV).

This week I was listening to the “Hey Amarillo!” podcast by Jason Boyett, which is a weekly podcast, featuring the people and stories of Amarillo. The latest episode was an interview with Dyron Howell who is a Christian believer and the founder of *SnackPak4Kids*, which is a local non-profit that seeks to end weekend hunger for children of low-income homes in our community. I couldn’t help but think of this week’s text, as I listened to this the story of *SnackPak*.

The vision for the non-profit came as Dyron watching a program on Dateline that explore the often hidden problem of hunger in our public schools and how that problem of hunger drastically impacts academic performance. It was a big problem, but Dyron’s heart was more than inconvenienced. He was moved to action. When *SnackPak4Kids* began, it began in Dyron’s home. The workers that made it happen were Dyron and his family. They went to Sam’s, bought enough food to make ten packs of food, and they took it to a local elementary school here in Amarillo. There they gave the food to children who were on free and reduced lunch so that these children wouldn’t have to go hungry over the weekend. Soon the program caught on and grew like wildfire.

Dyron tells the story of a little boy who was a regular recipient of a SnackPak. He was having an asthma attack and needed to be sent home for the day, but he refused to leave the school until he was able to get SnackPaks for himself in his siblings. Believe it or not, there is hunger so significant in our very own community that a little asthmatic boy would rather delay a breathing treatment than go without food for a weekend.

The need is great. But what God is to do through people who are willing to let him move through them is greater.

Less than a decade later, SnackPak4Kids feeds 10,000 children every single weekend.

You may not feel like what you have at your disposal is sufficient. But you don’t have to have enough. You just have to give what you do have to Jesus. His grace is sufficient for us; his power is made perfect in our weakness (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9).

In the wilderness outside of the small town of Bethsaida, the hunger of the crowd is fully satisfied. And the leftovers are abundant. In fact, they have more than what they began with.

This is more than a meal.

It is a sign and a wonder that points to the reality that when we are not enough, Jesus is always enough.

But there is more.

2.) A Biblical Perspective.

When we zoom out from the event itself and consider it through its context in the Scripture, the feeding of the 5000 begins to take on even more meaning.

At the time of Jesus’s ministry, the New Testament had not yet been written. However, the people of God did have the words of Scripture, which we call the Old Testament, and these words they were very familiar with. And perhaps the most famous of all the Old Testament stories was the story of the Exodus; the story of how God raised up a deliverer named Moses, set the people of Israel free from slavery, gave his people his word, and led his people through a wilderness to a Promise Land. The story of the Exodus was the story that carried the very identity of the people of Israel, and was, thus,

deep in the cultural memory of the people Jesus is ministering to.

And one of the most famous stories of the Exodus occurs in Exodus 16. The people of Israel have been delivered from slavery in Egypt by the power of God. As a nation, they are walking into the uncomfortable and the unknown. They are destined for the Promised Land, a land to call their own. But they are hungry. They cry out to God, they think they are on the verge of starvation, and God saves them by miraculously providing bread for them in the wilderness every day. The name of this bread is manna. Thus, every day as they walked through the wilderness, they ate manna. They consumed a meal that reminded them that God was their provider and sustainer.

Not coincidentally, here too in the wilderness outside of Bethsaida, there is a vast number of people who are hungry, and they too are being fed in this wilderness by one who is a prophet, speaking the very words of God. It might be possible for a modern reader to miss the parallelism here, but I think it would have been utterly impossible for a Jew in the first century to fail to make some connections.

Here at long last is a prophet like Moses that God has sent to his people. Only he is even greater than Moses. Like Moses, he speaks the very words of God and displays the power of God. But he will lead God's people on a greater Exodus; not an Exodus from physical slavery, but an Exodus from the power of sin and death. Who is this Jesus? He is showing that he is the Deliverer. He is the provider in the wilderness of our life. He is the one who will lead us into the Promised Land!

But Jesus will use this imagery to say something even more. This is from the book of John: *“Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’”* (John 6:32–35, ESV).

This is more than a meal.

Jesus is saying to us, “I am not just a provider – I am your provision in the wilderness. I am the ever-present one who never leaves or forsakes my people. I am the salvation for the starving, the hope of the downtrodden, the wisdom of for the searching, and the hope and reward for those who overcome.”

3.) An Eternal Perspective.

However, more than just biblical images of the past, this miracle is also a sign and a wonder that points toward a future hope.

For the Jews of the ancient world, there was a day that was longed for when God would send his anointed one who would bring about the kingdom of God and put the world to rights. And whenever this vision of hope was told, it was often told in the prophetic imagery of a feast.

This is from the Prophet Isaiah: *“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation’”* (Isaiah 25:6–9, ESV).

And here, in Luke 9, we come to a scene of a mountainside wilderness, where there is a feast given to a crowd. And this crowd isn't just a crowd. It is a crowd that represents "all peoples": Rich as well as poor; unclean farmers and fishermen, as well as the Pharisees.³ Jesus has now invited all peoples to a banquet. A crowd (ὄχλος)⁴ of strangers through Jesus and his sent ones becomes a people (κλισία)⁵ who now share table fellowship and food like a family.

This is more than a meal.

It is a messianic feast that signals that the age of the kingdom is near. God is making a way to set all things right and make all things new. In the context of Luke's gospel, this is the final clue that answers the question, "Who is Jesus?" As Dr. Robert Stein has written, **"He who can provide a 'messianic banquet'...must be the Messiah."**⁶

Who is the Messiah? The Messiah is the anointed one who will bring forth the kingdom of God! But how will this messiah bring the kingdom? In a way that no one could ever expect.

Have you ever wondered why the Bible specifies that there are 5000 men in this crowd? Is the Bible devaluing the worth of women or children? Not at all. It is to show that if he wants one, Jesus now has an army. An army – according to John's account – wants to make him king. But Jesus's kingdom will come another way.

Soon, Jesus will shift his journeys from traveling through the region of Galilee, and he will shift southward for his final journey to the city of Jerusalem where he will bring for the kingdom of God, not by a conquest, but by a cross.

Every week we remember this cross and how it brought about the kingdom in what we call "the Lord's Supper." In this meal, we lift our eyes to heaven. We remember the bread that was blessed, broken, and given so that we would remember.⁷ We remember that Jesus the righteous took upon his body the penalty of our sin. We remember that his blood is able to cleanse us and make us new. By this meal, we proclaim Christ's death, until he comes.

This is more than a meal.

In this meal, we remember the cost of redemption. We anticipate the feast that is to come. We look to the past. We look to the future. And with his in mind we place in our hope in a God who is capable of meeting every need we have in the present: **"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"** (Romans 8:32, ESV)

In many of the older traditions of the Christian faith, there is another word for what we might call the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. That word is "Eucharist." It comes from the Greek word

³ "What is regularly overlooked in this account is that the multitude will have almost certainly come from a wide cross-section of Galilean society. Just as a sizeable majority eked out a marginal existence, so too the simple farmers, fishermen, and homemakers of the province would have made up the largest portion of this crowd. Thus, by Pharisaic standards, one must describe this gathering as ritually impure." Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 19, New Studies in Biblical Theology (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2005), 105–106.

⁴ "a relatively large number of people gathered together, crowd." William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 745.

⁵ "a group of people eating together." Ibid. 550.

⁶ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 275.

⁷ Plummer, 244.

“*eucharisteo*” (εὐχαριστέω), which simply means “Thank you.”

So Redeemer Christian Church, today as we remember the One who provides bread for all who are hungry in the wilderness, as we remember the One who will usher in the feast of the kingdom of God, as we remember the One whose body was given and whose blood was shed, let us respond in the only way we can. From the depths of our being, let us say, “Thank you.” Let us taste and see that Jesus is good (cf. Ps. 34:8)! Let us take refuge in him! AMEN.

Community Group Discussion Starters

- 1) *The “feeding of the 5000” miracle happens as the disciples return from their first missionary journey. They are tired and ready to retreat and rest, but a crowd in need interrupts them. How should this miracle and its context challenge the way we look at interruptions and inconveniences?*
- 2) *The disciples have a ludicrously small amount of food to feed such a large crowd, but Jesus takes what they have, and he uses it to accomplish the miraculous. How should this transform the way we look at our limitations?*
- 3) *How does the Exodus story of God providing manna to his people in the wilderness (Ex. 16) give a deeper meaning to this passage? How can we apply that deeper meaning to our lives?*
- 4) *How might this passage effect the way we approach and experience taking the Lord’s Supper?*

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