

## Luke 29 – The Feeding of the 5,000

There is no doubt that there are many people in the world who have need of food, primarily because they have no access to it. These shortages of food often come from famine and drought. Climate conditions in some nations are such that if the rainy seasons don't come with any degree of regularity, food becomes scarce. Other food shortages are caused by corrupt government. It is true that with the technology available today, every person on the earth could conceivably have enough food to eat each day. When other countries try to support those impoverished nations with food, sometimes the government will not allow food to get to its citizens. Much of the starvation that happened in Sudan in the late 1990s was because of a corrupt government. Sometimes, however, people don't have enough food because they don't spend their money wisely. This is particularly true in our country.

Many organizations, particularly Christian organizations, have seen this need in the world and have endeavored to meet it. This is especially true in emergency situations. When the earthquake happened in Haiti, many Christians gave so that the people there would have what they needed. This is admirable and should be a part of who Christians are: compassionate and concerned for the welfare of others. First, however, I would like to make a distinction between needing food and being hungry. Many people go to bed hungry, but this is not the real issue. Someone can live with hunger, but still be nourished. We in America are accustomed to never being hungry, or always being able to meet that need, and so try to pass that ideal onto the world. Hunger is not the issue, however.

Second, I would like to say that while it is good that Christians want to meet the needs of providing food for hungry people, this is not the primary call of Christians. We talked about this in the beginning verses of Luke 9, where I would like you to turn. Jesus' primary concern was evangelism, not meeting physical needs. Before Jesus left the earth, He instructed his disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Jesus wanted people to hear the good news of Jesus, not be fed. Many churches get this mixed up. They lift up philanthropy over telling others of their need to trust Jesus as Saviour. As a result, missions are ignoring the one true need of everyone in the world: their soul.

Third, I will say that Jesus was concerned with physical needs, but for a different reason than the mainline denominations are. Jesus, when He acted to remedy a problem, did so out of compassion, but also because He wanted to authenticate His message. Jesus came to this world, not to heal all diseases. There are many diseases Jesus left unhealed. Acts 3 tells of a man who had been begging at the temple for years and was healed by the disciples. It is impossible to suggest that Jesus never saw this man, yet He never healed him. Jesus claimed in John 17 that the reason He came into the world was to "bear witness to the truth." This truth was the truth about God and what God's Plan was: namely the redemption of all mankind. He came to teach about God and what God was doing in sending His only begotten Son Jesus.

Jesus, then, used these miracles and provisions to substantiate this all-important message. He says this in several places. He says in John 5:36 "But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." He said in John 10:37-38: "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." He said in John 14:11: "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." Some people nowadays believe that people can do these gifts of healing, but these were meant to be "sign gifts" to make sure people knew that what Jesus said was true. One of those signs is what we will read about today.

Luke 9:10-14 says: "And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing. And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him,

Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place. But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people. For they were about five thousand men.”

Remember that in the beginning of Luke 9, Jesus sent his twelve disciples into the country to go and preach the good news of the kingdom. This included the offer of a physical kingdom on the earth. Now, the disciples, or “apostles” come back to Jesus to report of how things went. Jesus takes them and invites them to go into a desert place. Mark 6:31 says that He said unto them, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while.” Mark says that there were many people coming to Jesus, and He wanted to get alone with His disciples. We in America sometimes worship vacation and our leisure time, and this excess is wrong, but that does not mean that there is never time for resting. Everyone needs to unwind once in a while and take time to refocus. It’s good to be able to spend time focusing on what is important to you, instead of giving in to the pressures around you all the time. This is what Jesus seeks to do with His disciples.

Luke tells us that Jesus took His disciples to a desert place that belonged to a city called “Bethsaida.” The word “Bethsaida” means “fishing house” and it was located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. John 1:44 tells us that Peter and Andrew were from Bethsaida, and John 12:21 tells us that Philip was as well. This was not only a nice retreat, but familiar territory for some of the disciples. However, Luke says that the multitudes of people found out that Jesus was there, and began to follow Him. At this point, Jesus has two options. He can say to the people: “There is time for you later. Right now this is about my disciples and my rest.” Or He can say: “Even though I am tired and need this time, I will minister to you.” Jesus has compassion and “receives them.” He both preaches to them about the kingdom of God and heals people as well.

Luke tells us that over the course of the day, the crowd of people swelled to over five thousand. Luke and others say that there were five thousand men, but this excludes the women and the children. It is possible that this crowd could have numbered close to twenty thousand people. The area around the Sea of Galilee is very mountainous, and so it is easy to imagine that Jesus could have spoken to that many people. If they were near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus could have preached from a boat, as He did in Matthew 13:2. But probably He was on the shore, since He needed to minister to them. The story that happens next is one of the few passages that is recorded in all four Gospel accounts. The Holy Spirit used the four Gospel writers to emphasize different parts of Jesus ministry and message, and so some contain stories that others don’t. The Gospel of John contains the most amount of information that the other writers do not tell us about. But this story is in all four.

Verse 12 says that when the day began to end, Jesus’ disciples come to Him. They have a request for Jesus, but it is not one that you might expect. The Bible says that they requested that Jesus would send the people away. Though they are overwhelmed and looking forward to time away, this is not the reason that they give for wanting the people to leave. They say that they want the people to leave because no one has been paying attention to how late the day is getting. Remember, there is over 10,000 people there, and they are outside a small fishing village. This town is not going to be able to supply food for all of these people, and the disciples are aware of this. Not only are they concerned about food, but some of them, if they wait too long, will have to stay the night in Bethsaida or in the desert. They tell Jesus that if the people are going to be able to make it past Bethsaida, He should send them now before it is too late.

Jesus, however, instead of sending the people away, gives an unusual response. Luke 9:13 says “But he said unto them, ‘Give ye them to eat.’” Jesus suggests, or rather commands, that the disciples provide food for the people. Matthew says that Jesus said, “They need not depart.” Jesus not only takes away the option of the disciples to send the people away, but He says that the disciples themselves should provide for the people. John 6:5-6 says that Jesus offered how the disciples might provide for the multitude. It says “When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.”

Jesus told the disciples to do something, then suggested the problem of not having the place to buy bread. Jesus is not suggesting the impossible so that he can shame the disciples, but to show them what He can do. God delights in being all that we need for our lives. He is our sufficiency; it is not in ourselves, but in Him. The same is true for life. God says in 1 Peter 1:15 "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." God tells us to be holy, but this is impossible for us. None of us are perfect or sinless. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." Romans 3:10 says "There is none righteous, no, not one." No one on this earth, including you, is good enough for God, since His standard is absolute perfection. For those of you who believe that you have done more good than bad, I give you this verse. James 2:10 says "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." If you keep every commandment, God says, and break just one of His laws, you will be held guilty of them all.

Why then does God call us to holiness? Why does He expect something that is impossible to us? How can God only accept those who have done perfectly? The first reason is that God must accept only those who are perfect. God, being holy and perfect, cannot dwell with sinners. He can have no "fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." Thus, He cannot have fellowship with us, and cannot let us into heaven. God says in Isaiah 59:2 "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." The second reason is that God is just. If He is a good and perfect God, He must also be just. He must always do the verdant thing, which includes punishing sin. The Bible says in Genesis 18:25 "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

So if it is true that God only accepts those who are holy, how can we expect to be right with God? The truth is this: What we cannot do, God has done Himself. You see, Jesus asked His disciples what they would do, knowing they could do nothing. They offered suggestions. Mark 6:37 says that they asked: "Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?" Philip in John 6:7 debunks that idea by saying: "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." John tells us that Andrew goes and finds a boy with a little lunch. We will look at this in a minute, but even Andrew says, "but what are they among so many?" Jesus asked them, knowing that they could not solve this problem in and of themselves, as you cannot for your problem, and that that realization would drive them to Him.

You see, there are many people who, when they realize that they are sinners, try to work out for themselves how to solve this problem. They try to be a better person. They go to church. They get baptized. They give money to the church. They take the Eucharist and go to confession. They try all the things they can, but none of it is sufficient. Romans 3:20 says: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Ephesians 2:8-9 says "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." We cannot be good enough for God, and that should drive us to cry out to God for salvation.

The truth is that what you could not do for yourself, God has already done. God, in love, sent Jesus Christ His Son to the earth. He lived a perfect, sinless life and then allowed Himself to be crucified on the cross. But He didn't die for His own sins; He died for yours and mine. He died to take the punishment that a just God must mete out. Now He offers that forgiveness to you. If you will this morning believe that Jesus died for you, you can be saved. You can have the gift of forgiveness and salvation that comes through trusting Jesus only. If you trust your baptism or your good works, you will fail. By trusting Jesus only can you have eternal life. The Bible says "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." But you must first see that you in and of yourself cannot save yourself. Jesus had to get these disciples to this place before He would work His miracle that we are about to see.

The Bible says in verse 13 that when Jesus commands the disciples to give the people food, they answer this way: "We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people." Again the other Gospel writers said that some disciples offered a monetary figure. Philip says that two hundred

pennies worth would not be enough to feed all the people. That “penny” was a Roman *denarius*, and was equivalent to a day’s wage, according to Matthew 20:2. Therefore, 200 denarii was equivalent to eight month’s wages. For someone earning \$20,000 a year in today’s terms, this would \$16,000. That is a lot of money, but I doubt any of you could sufficiently feed 10,000 people with that much money. According to scholars, one penny could buy twelve loaves of bread. These were not loaves like we think, but small rolls that were one-half inch thick by seven inches in diameter. 200 pennies, then, could buy 2400 loaves, which would be approximately one for every two people at best, five or six at worst. It is clear that the disciples have neither the money nor the wherewithal to provide for the people.

However, John tells us that Andrew the brother of Jesus finds a small boy who has a lunch. It is not a very big lunch, but it is a lunch. The Bible tells us that it is five loaves of bread and two fishes. John tells us that these loaves are barley loaves, which was the food of poor people. The fish are mostly likely preserved or salted fish, though it is impossible to say what kind of fish they were. It is a small lunch, but it all Jesus needs in order to perform His miracle. For you, friend, let me say this: Jesus is not looking for great faith. You need not understand every single verse in the Bible in order to be saved. You need only the simple faith to believe that Jesus died for your sins. Jesus said in Matthew 17:20: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” If you will simply believe that Jesus died for you, He will move the mountain of sin that stands between you and God.

Luke 9:14-17 says “And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company. And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude. And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.” God is a God of order. He wants things done in an orderly fashion. This is most evident in His creation. Look up into the sky, and you can predict with accuracy where a certain star will be on a certain date. The stars are ordered in such a way that we can depend on their precision. God is a God of order. Look down into a microscope and see the interworkings of a cell. You can see each little part fulfilling its function and doing what it is supposed to do. God is a God of order. To think that all of this order came out of disorder is intellectual dishonesty. Nature itself shows how ordered God is.

Jesus, being God in human flesh, tells the disciples to make the people sit in groups of fifty. Some of the people may have seen this as Jesus organizing troops, because John tells us that after this episode is when the people tried to make Him the King. But it is so the disciples can get food to each group in an orderly fashion. The people sit down. Mark says that they sat on green grass. Jesus takes these loaves and fish and raises His eyes to heaven. He prays and thanks God for the food He provided and for what He is about to do. Then the Bible simply says that he brake them and gave to his disciples. I have always wondered what that looked like. Did the food multiply in His hand as He broke it off? Did a new half of a loaf grow on the one that had just been broken? As he reached into the basket to pull a fish out, did another one appear? We do not know.

Some liberal scholars who don’t believe in miracles have suggested that this was a hoax and that Jesus was standing in front of the mouth of a cave that held food, and that the disciples passed him food, making it look as if He was multiplying it. This is a far-fetched hypothesis, especially considering both that the disciples were poor and that this was an impromptu meeting. What happened here was a simple miracle, and it is written in all four gospels as a simple account. It is not written in bombastic terms as other miracles written about in the ancient world. There is no thunder from Zeus or angels attending. It is simply Jesus, breaking bread and distributing to His disciples. Only those who have already decided that miracles and anything supernatural cannot happen cast questions about the validity of this story.

The disciples, who have been living on the generosity of others, now find themselves being generous to the multitude. They pass around the fish and the loaves. The people of first century Palestine lived with hunger. It

was only on special occasions, such as weddings and harvest feasts that the people ate to their full. We Americans are unaware of hunger like this, but it is the way that these people lived and the way most of the world today lives. But today, these people can eat as much as they want. They eat to the fill. John says that Jesus gave “as much as they would.” Luke tells us “And they did eat, and were all filled.” This was a day where no one would go home hungry. This boy who gave the lunch got to eat more than he brought.

John tells us that Jesus then said, “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” God is not only a God of order, but He is a God who doesn’t want to waste what He has provided. Again, we in America are used to wasting. Almost everything in our society is disposable. But Jesus told his disciples to gather up what remained. All four Gospels tell us that what they gathered was twelve baskets full of bread and fish. Why twelve? The Bible is full of the number twelve. This most likely represents the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus, in a picture, was saying that He was the Bread of Life for the nation of Israel. The offer of the kingdom was still available to the nation of Israel, if they would meet the spiritual requirements. They were called upon to repent of both their sins and their idea of being right before God, and conform to what Jesus was saying.

Again, John tells us that after this the people sought to make Jesus a king. They wanted a physical ruler. They had heard that He could cast out demons and that He could raise the dead. A king who could do all these things as well as provide food for the army would mean that they would be basically unstoppable. But Jesus, says John, refuses. John 6:15 says that when Jesus knew this, He departed into a mountain. The next day they found Him and started to ask Him questions, and this is what Jesus said to them: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.”

Jesus again reminds them of the spiritual conditions. They are interested in the physical miracles, not changing themselves. But the miracles of Jesus were supposed to support what Jesus was saying, not replace them. The people wanted all the joys of having their physical land free, but still wanted their sins, which were much more enslaving than the Romans. When they asked Him what He meant by spiritual conditions in John 6, Jesus said this: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Jesus said that the only way that they can get forgiveness is by believing in Jesus. The same is true for you today. If you will this morning believe that Jesus died for you, you can be saved. It is the only way that God has provided. You need not clean up your life first, nor go to church for any length of time, nor pay a certain amount of money, not to be baptized. Simply believe that Jesus died for you. Turn from your works and place your faith in Jesus. Will you do that today?

If you will, the Bible says that what will occur is a bigger miracle than what Jesus did in feeding the five thousand. If you will trust Jesus as your Saviour, He will first forgive your sins. Your record with God will be clean and free. You will not have to worry about having to pay for those sins yourself in the lake of fire. Second, He will make you a new person. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” You will be born again as a new creation of God. Third, you will be a child of God. John 1:12 says “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” This miracle can take place in your life this morning. Will you, where you are, trust Jesus as your Saviour? Will you call upon Him to save you? If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact us. You can do so in the following ways:

You can stop by our church building, which is located at 909 W. 8th St., by the softball diamonds. You can call us at 732-3321. You can E-mail us at [church@fbcpr.org](mailto:church@fbcpr.org). That’s CHURCH at F B C P R dot O R G. Or you can log on to our website, which is [www.fbcpr.org](http://www.fbcpr.org). If you would like to have a copy of this broadcast, either in audio or transcript form, you can find it on our website tomorrow. If you enjoy this program, let us know by contacting our church. Please join us this morning at 10:30 for our worship service. Please join us again next week for the Way of Truth Radio Broadcast, brought to you by the First Baptist Church of Park Rapids, MN.