

Luke 9:10-17

10 And returning, the apostles told him (Jesus) all they had done.¹ And he took them with him and withdrew privately to a town called Bethsaida. 11 When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them and told them about the Kingdom of God, and he healed those who needed to be cured.²

12 The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside to lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place."³ 13 But he said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go buy food for all these people," 14 for there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each." 15 They did so and made them all sit down.⁴ 16 Taking the five

¹ At the beginning of Chapter 9, Jesus sent his disciples out, giving them authority and power over demons and to cure the sick. In all of this, their main purpose was to proclaim the kingdom of God. As they embarked on their journey, Jesus offered to them specific instructions: "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. ⁴ Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. ⁵ Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them (Luke 9:3-5)." Here, in verse 10, we are told that the disciples have returned from their mission and have reported their work to Jesus. For whatever reason, the details of their mission work was not of supreme importance in light of the mission and ministry of Jesus to the world.

² At this point in Jesus' ministry, crowd control has become an issue. And so, from time to time, Jesus withdraws with his disciples to a private place. In Luke's Gospel, whenever Jesus "withdraws" to a private place with his disciples, it is to take time for prayer and refreshment (Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 362)." But in this instance, he is not able to get away from the crowds. Now, rather than rebuking them or angrily requesting a moments peace and rest, Jesus welcomes the crowd and begins teaching them about the Kingdom.

³ Assessing the situation, the disciples realize they are in a bit of a bind. They have no food or provisions with them and evening is rapidly approaching. In light of the fact that the group is so close to Bethsaida, the disciples tell Jesus to send the crowds away so that they can find food and shelter for the night. This scene is ironic, and almost laughable, for earlier, when Jesus sent his disciples out on their mission, he instructed them "to take no bread on the journey (v. 3); thus they were counseled to carry on the divine mission while trusting in divine benefaction and resources. Had they not trusted and been successful earlier? If one reaches further back into the Lukan narrative, one remembers Jesus' instructions on Simon's boat that had led to a miraculous catch of fish (5:1-11). If he was able to provide then, why not know (Green, 363)?"

⁴ Despite their lack of faith in God's provision, Jesus instructs his disciples to feed the crowd. When they protest again, using the evidence of the need through the loaves and fishes, Jesus commands them to gather the crowds in groups of fifty. While we might want to read into this number, more than likely, groups of fifty was a manageable way of distributing all the food to all those gathered. If you think about

loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.⁵ 17 And all ate and were filled. What was left was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.⁶

it, if there are five thousand people, and they are clumped together in groups of fifty, then there are only one hundred groups for the disciples to attend to.

⁵ As we hear Luke's description of Jesus' actions, the language used in reference to the feeding of the five thousand should call to mind three other significant biblical moments that deal with food. The first comes from Israel's experience in the wilderness, when God provided for his people with the manna from heaven (found in Exodus 16:15 and Numbers 11:6). Second, we have Elisha's feeding of one hundred people in 2 Kings 4:42-44. Finally, Jesus' actions, taking the bread, blessing it, breaking it, and handing it to his disciples; these call to mind Jesus last supper before his crucifixion. While all of these references are not explicitly made within the text, "the provision of bread for a multitude in the wilderness would have evoked powerful associations for all whom the exodus was a significant event in their religious heritage and Scriptures (R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke" *The New Interpreters Bible*, vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 195-96)." Within Jesus' actions we can see the continual saving provision of God for his people.

⁶ At the end of this scene we are able to pick up on a key theme within Luke's Gospel. While we often treat the Kingdom as something far off and distant, Luke connects the Kingdom with Jesus' ministry. As one commentator notes, "Mary had predicted that the hungry would be filled (1:53), and Jesus had interpreted the meaning of salvation, in part, as the filling of the hungry (6:21) (Green, 365)." What we discover in Jesus ministry is the reality that the people are "filled." God's provision for his people is known in and through Jesus. Yet, we discover in this passage that God's provision goes much deeper than hunger and physical ailments, for the provision of God comes to his people as the man Jesus; dwelling in the midst of them so that he might be one with them.