

The Gospel According to Luke
Luke 9:10-17 (*Mark 6:30-44 and Matthew 14:13-21*)
Reading: Mark 6:30-44

Sermon #38
May 5, 2019

Learning Through Miracles

Purposeful Miracles

Most of us have heard the story of Jesus feeding the 5000. It is only 1 of 2 miracles recorded in all 4 gospels, the other being Jesus' resurrection. Because of its familiarity a preacher can feel pressure and the need to find something new or different in an effort not to be boring. However, the truth is there is nothing new in the scriptures, they are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and the preacher's job is to bring forth God's truth and apply it to our lives. So, this is what I will work at doing this morning. A simple message I believe filled with God's truth balanced with compassion and love. May it fill you with God's love, hope, peace and joy.

Jesus performed countless miracles during his earthly ministry, far beyond the 3-dozen recorded in the New Testament. John gave the reason for writing his gospel and really the reason for God's purpose in inspiring the Bible as a whole, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31) So, the main purpose of the Bible is "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Everything in the Bible has this purpose – the Old Testament is all about God the Father and the coming Messiah and the New Testament is all about God the Father and "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" who came as promised, that he lives and he will return.

Jesus performed miracles to show his supernatural power over the natural and his compassion for those who were suffering. We cannot separate the miracles from the teaching and truth Jesus taught because they also show both God the Father and Jesus the Son's compassion for people. Jesus performed miracles before thousands of people even though most of these people would reject the gospel of salvation and Jesus' divinity. This illustrates what we call God's "common grace". Jesus explained common grace saying, ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." We are to love the enemies of Christ, which are our enemies, for this is evidence that we do not belong the world and do not serve the prince of this world, but we belong to the King of kings. Jesus says if we live in this manner some of God's enemies will become believers in his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus continues why this behavior is important and the concept of common grace, "For ~~he~~ God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:43-48) Do not let the use of the word "perfect" here confuse you, they are 2 different words translated here as the word "perfect". God is perfect in that he is complete without flaw or sin. Jesus is saying we must be perfect as a sacrifice is without blemish because the Holy Spirit lives within us – Jesus is the only perfect sacrifice and as such he has appointed that we are his sacrifice to the world as we are living the gospel and being perfected; which will not be completed until heaven because in our mortal state we are tempted and sin. The life of a Christian is to be

one that moves ever closer to God and through his power overcomes temptation and sins less and less, living more and more to bring God glory.

Before we explore the miracle of the feeding of 5000, we begin in verse 10 with the return of the apostles from their missionary journey.

Learning Balance

Last week we studied the 9 verses prior to today's passage where Jesus sent out the 12 to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God and heal the sick. We are not sure how long they were gone, but I can tell you from being a missionary that traveled a great deal it is often fatiguing. The disciples returned to Jesus as verse 10 says, "On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida." Jesus wants time alone with the 12 to debrief what had happened during their missionary travels and to have some "down time" to rest. In Mark's account we read, Jesus said to the disciples "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." (Mark 6:31) Jesus had been doing ministry all by himself up till he sent out the 12 and he knew well the fatigue of ministering to the crowds of people. There is a time to work and time to rest. Even God in creating the universe gives us an example of the rhythm of work and rest. Remember an earlier time when Jesus and the disciples left the crowds and entered the boat to cross the Sea of Galilee and even though there was a storm the tired Jesus sleep.

As we consider our life's rhythm and balance of work and family and ministry and rest it reminds me of a simple story.

A young man challenged an older man to an all-day wood cutting contest. The challenger worked very hard, stopping only for a brief lunch break. The

seasoned man had a leisurely lunch and took several breaks during the day. At the end of the day, the young challenger was surprised and very annoyed to find that the seasoned wood cutter had chopped substantially more wood than he had.

The young challenger said, “I don’t get it, every time I checked, you were taking a rest, yet you chopped more wood than I did. How can this be?”

“But you didn’t notice,” said the winning seasoned woodsman, “that I was sharpening my ax when I sat down to rest.”

Proper rest allows you to focus on the task. At the beginning of America entering World War II everything went into hyper-speed. However, it was soon realized as the factories extended working hours to manufacture war equipment that production per hour fell and accidents increased when the work day exceeded 10 hours. Good time management helps one to balance the needs of work, family, ministry and rest. Just as the crowds did not respect Jesus and his disciple’s need for rest – always crowding in and wanting more, so too, our lives are the same today. People and events work to control our time and keep us out of balance. Others often will not respect your need for rest and you will have to take it. We have worked hard on the remodel of this church and now we are slowing the remodel down because we were getting tired and there are other demands that need our attention to maintain balance; spiritual time, needs of family and home.

One last comment on verse 10 before we move on; we cannot pinpoint Bethsaida’s location today, but it was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum. The name Bethsaida means, house of fish. This is the hometown of Andrew, Peter and Philip. Bethsaida is another example of Common Grace by the miracles Jesus and his disciples performed there in order that the people would

know message of the kingdom of God and they compassionately healed the sick. You may ask, why is this town an example of common grace? Jesus later says this, “Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵ ... You shall be brought down to Hades.” (Luke 10:13-15) Nazareth was not the only town to reject its own – Jesus, Andrew, Peter and Philip preached the gospel of Christ and the kingdom of God and healed the sick, yet the people did not believe. Despite their rejection, both Jesus and the disciples were faithful to preach the kingdom of God and the gospel of salvation and heal. Should we – can we, do any less? My beloved, may we live and proclaim the gospel in faithfulness and serve others with the love of Christ.

Learning To Nourish The Soul

Jesus and the disciples had hoped to rest and have solitude in “a desolate place and rest a while” according to Mark’s account. (Mark 6:31) However, that was not to be, reading verse 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.” Mark’s account is more descriptive, “they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.” (Mark 6:32-33) Jesus does not turn the people away or set sail again to go somewhere else, but he shows compassion; first by preaching to them the “kingdom of God”, the eternal truth of salvation and validating his authority by healing the sick and showing compassion. Jesus is an example of true balance in teaching God’s truth and showing his compassion for people in need. Jesus knew it was miracles that most wanted to see or experience but he began with the truth,

God's truth. To heal without the truth fixes a short-term problem but ends in eternal suffering. Though many sought miracles as spectators Jesus knew the truth preached, the kingdom of God is at hand and then followed by miracles to show his authority and compassion would reach some and their hearts would be changed forever.

Today people shy away from proclaiming the kingdom of God and the gospel of salvation through Christ for fear of rejection or feeling they are not qualified or they do not know the scriptures well enough. I say, look to Jesus, he is God and he was rejected but it did not stop him from proclaiming the kingdom of God and his gospel of salvation. There is a quote from the demon Screwtape to his nephew, Wormwood in the Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis, the demon Screwtape says, "A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all – and more amusing." Satan and his demons live and do evil in the world of half-truths and unfortunately many churches have become moderated religions of half-truths. May this never be said of us, my beloved, may we live the eternal truths of the Bible with compassion and love for others. May we be ever ready for battle to expose evil and shine the glory of God into this dark world.

Learning To Follow Jesus' Example

Now we come to the miracle within this passage, reading beginning at 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.' 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.”

The 12 had just returned from their missionary trip in which Jesus gave them his authority and power to preach and do miracles, and they did. They followed Jesus’ teaching and example. However, there seems to be a disconnect with all the miracles Jesus has already performed and the ones the disciples had recently performed to heal the sick and what Jesus wants them to see and experience now. Feeding people with little that becomes enough for all by the miracle of God was not new, so the disciples should know the spiritual relationship with this miracle. God daily fed 2 million in the wilderness with manna from heaven – a miracle. The prophet Elisha fed many with a little another miracle, “A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, ‘Give to the men, that they may eat.’⁴³ But his servant said, ‘How can I set this before a hundred men?’ So he repeated, ‘Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, “They shall eat and have some left.”’⁴⁴ So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.” (2 Kings 4:42-44) Also a miracle that began with little, fed a lot and there was leftovers. The disciples in the 2nd half of Jesus’ 3-year earthly ministry continued to be strong at times in their faith, but also weak at times and it was not until Pentecost that they received the Holy Spirit and their faith gained strength to carry them daily to be faithful in their mission to proclaim the kingdom of God unto their death. My beloved, have we not, as believers in Jesus as the Christ, been filled with God the Holy Spirit just as the

disciples? Yes, it is God's gift to believers. Then, we have God's power within in us to proclaim the kingdom of God until we draw our last breath – may we be faithful.

The disciples were in the presentence of Jesus and yet they thought only of human solutions. Even after spending almost 3 years with Jesus, when he went with Peter, James and John to the mountain where he was transfigured, the remaining 9 disciples could not cast out a demon because they lacked faith. “The disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’²⁰ He said to them, ‘Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:19-20) I do not want to judge the disciples for I am observing this event and Jesus' teachings, as with the rest of the Bible, from a historical perspective and that is of great advantage. The question before the disciples at that time was, did they believe, not in themselves, but in Jesus? The same question is before us, in whom do you believe and trust? Let me clear, we do not command Jesus and determine what is to be done, but unlike the disciples who failed to cast out the demon and only saw the human solution to feeding the hungry, we are to seek God and his will and be faithful to carry it out in faith – this is following Jesus' example , this brings balance and living in this manner nourishes one's soul.

When Jesus told the disciples to feed the 5000 men and we can assume the crowd included women and children with the total crowd having been as many as 15 to 20,000 people, the disciples saw just the human solution – send the people away to find food for themselves. Jesus challenges them and they see only 5 small loafs of bread and 2 fish and then they add in an attempt to make their point about how hopeless it was to try feeding this crowd – they say to Jesus, do you want us to

go the nearby villages and buy food? In Mark's account it is suggested that 200 denarii would be enough to purchase food for the crowd. In today's value that would be about 15,000 dollars or 75 cents to a dollar per person, which today, as then, will not buy much of a meal. In addition, I doubt, Judas' money purse had anything close to 200 denarii. The disciples just did not see beyond the physical and looked at Jesus, as if to say, we have only a little food and money so we see no solution. Jesus' response is not to rebuke the disciples but to give them a simple command, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." They did not challenge his command and were obedient. We know from the other gospel accounts it was Spring time, before the Passover and that a desolate place meant that it was isolated, not barren, the area was covered in green grass and there was plenty of room for the people to sit down in groups of 50 to 100. The people did not question Jesus or his disciples and showed a greater obedience than the disciples first did by doing as they were asked and sat down in small groups.

Jesus took "the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them." By Jesus' looking up to heaven he was acknowledging that God is the source of all that we have. This is the reason we follow his example and say a blessing before eating. My beloved, we need to help our children understand it is not a meaningless ritual or just something we do, but it is giving thanks to the Creator God for his compassion to care for us. Once Jesus had said the blessing, "Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd." Luke is simple and matter of fact, but Jesus' miracle created much from little and all those there had no doubt that it was Jesus who was the source of this miracle and that he had authority and power over the physical world. Sadly, most did not move beyond the miracle to an understanding that Jesus was far more than a miracle worker – he was the Messiah or the Christ. In the same way the Lord feeds

your soul and fills your heart and soul to overflowing with his love and grace and mercies, he creates in you far more than you are and gives you the ability to have peace where there is no peace, to have joy in difficult times and to love the unlovable – he feeds your soul to overflowing so that you may feed others in his name and if they come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior they too will be satisfied in a way the world does not understand and are called to follow the example of Jesus – proclaiming the gospel and serving others.

The meal began with a meager 5 small loafs of bread and 2 fish, but we read the people “all ate and were satisfied.” The word “satisfied” means to eat until one is full and desires no more. The people did not just each get a little, enough to curb their hunger, but they ate until they wanted no more. Jesus wants his followers to have so much of him that they are filled up and cannot help but overflow with his blessings and give them to others. After the resurrection the disciples, who became apostles, were so filled with Christ and his Holy Spirit that they could do nothing else but share the gospel with all who would listen and even with those who did not listen because they were filled with Christ and His Spirit. The disciples waited until after Jesus’ resurrection to wholeheartedly engage in ministry, let me ask, what are you waiting for? For you to believe in Christ to the point you are filled and satisfied, what needs to happen? What will it take for you to feed the spiritually hungry as Jesus calls all believers to do? Not all who heard Jesus and not all that saw the miracles he performed, and not all he fed came to God through faith in him, but that did not stop him or later stop his disciples from proclaiming the kingdom of God – do not let rejection and dull ears keep you from proclaiming the kingdom of God to those who will hear and to those who do not have spiritual ears to hear alike.

Missionary and author Jerry Bridges wrote in his book *The Pursuit of Holiness*, “Faith and holiness are inextricably linked. Obeying the commands of God usually involves believing the promises of God.” This echoes the teaching of Jesus when he said of the obedient servant, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:23) Does your life reflect obedience and therefore holiness? Have you entered into the joy of your Lord and Master? Do people see in your life lived for Christ; joy, peace and love for others? My beloved, let us as individuals, as families and as a community of Christ live in faith and obedience and holiness proclaiming the kingdom of God because of our overwhelming love for Christ. Because he feeds us spiritually, Jesus takes your dead and empty soul and fills it to overflowing. If we surrender our lives to Christ, we will know we have entered into the joy of our Master because our life will have balance, our soul is nourished and we will have joy in all circumstances. Share the kingdom of God and the gospel of salvation, serve others and have joy. Amen!