

## Rediscover Jesus

### Part 27: Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand | Luke 9:10-17

Pastor Eric Yee

### Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

### Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 27 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're studying the Gospel account of Luke from chapters 4-9, which record Jesus' public ministry in the area of Galilee.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand."

### Sermon Introduction

What does it mean to be "satisfied"?

If you go to a restaurant to eat and you leave the review of "satisfactory," is that what you mean by being satisfied—that it's not the best, not the worst, but it adequately met expectations?

If you're at an all-you-can-eat buffet at a 3-star Michelin restaurant, where you *literally* eat all you can eat, so that you cannot possibly eat any more, is that what you mean by being satisfied—that there's such an unmatched standard of *quality* and such a superabundance of *quantity* that it's immeasurably more than you could've ever asked or imagined (Eph. 3:20)?

There's a "satisfactory" kind of satisfaction that doesn't *really* satisfy, but it leaves us wanting for more. But then there's a "superabundant" kind of satisfaction that *truly* satisfies, leaving us with nothing left to want for.

In this world, we experience countless examples of "satisfactory" satisfaction, but we only get a few glimpses of "superabundant" satisfaction.

But even in those glimpses, they're still just *shadows* of *true* satisfaction. No matter how satisfying those experiences are, we inevitably are left hungry and thirsting later on. The *substance* of true satisfaction can only be found in Jesus, for he alone says, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

### The One Thing

***Only Jesus provides what truly satisfies.***

### Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 9:10-17.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

Last week, as we entered into Luke chapter 9, we saw that Jesus commissioned his twelve apostles for the *first* time to no longer be merely *observers* but now *participants* in his ministry, so he equipped them with his power and authority, and he sent them out to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God throughout the towns of Galilee and to confirm their message with powerful accompanying signs.

As a result, Herod the tetrarch, who ruled over the region of Galilee, heard about all that was happening in his area of governance, and he asked the million-dollar question that everyone has been asking throughout Luke's Gospel account: Who is this Jesus?

So that's where we are in today's passage.

## **Scripture Reading**

Let's read Luke 9:10-17.

<sup>10</sup> On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." <sup>15</sup> And they did so, and had them all sit down. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

This is God's Word.

Now apart from the resurrection, this is the only miracle performed by Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospel accounts—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—and so it is "the most well-attested, eye-witness account of any miracle that Jesus ever performed during his earthly ministry."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this particular miracle in Jesus' ministry meant a great deal to the early church.<sup>2</sup>

## **Overview**

We'll look at this passage in two parts.

- I. Jesus compassionately serves (vv. 10-12)
- II. Jesus completely satisfies (vv. 13-17)

### **I. Jesus compassionately serves (vv. 10-12)**

Verse 10 says this:

<sup>10</sup> On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida.

So after the short missions trip that Jesus sent his twelve apostles on, they return and tell Jesus "all that they had done."

- They recounted to him how they had *cast out* demons, how they had *healed* diseases, but most importantly, how they had faithfully *proclaimed* the good news of the kingdom of God throughout the towns of Galilee.
- They also recounted how, in some towns, *nobody* received them or their message, and how in some towns, they found people who *believed* their message, *received* them into their home, and *provided* for them—just like Jesus said they would.

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 192-193.

<sup>2</sup> Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008). David L. Jeffrey (*Luke*, BTCB [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012], 137) writes: "Floor mosaics in Asia Minor, the Trinity sarcophagus in the Lateran Museum in Rome (ca. AD 315), the representation in the Catacombs of Domitilla (ca. AD 375) are all later than the stone relief carvings of this miracle—clearly five loaves and two fishes—in Luoyang, only recently come to light, which are thought to date from the second century."

Remember, this was the *first* time the apostles did anything like this, so just imagine how *excited* they were to share with Jesus.

But as *exciting* of an experience all this was for the apostles, they must have been *exhausted* (cf. Mark 6:31).

So Jesus “took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida”—or as verse 12 tells us later, to a “desolate place” (Luke 9:12) *near* Bethsaida—for the purpose of rest and refreshment (Mark 6:31).<sup>3</sup>

But verse 11 says this:

<sup>11</sup> 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.

Evidently, as the parallel accounts tells us, the crowds saw that Jesus and his apostles got in a *boat* (Mark 6:32; cf. Matt. 14:13; John 6:1), so they followed him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Mark’s account says that “they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them” (Mark 6:33).

Now if you were *exhausted*, and you wanted to get away with some close friends to a place that you thought would be “desolate” (or empty), what would you be thinking and feeling once you got there only to find that there are *crowds* of people there who *want something* from you?

Perhaps you might yell, “Go away! Leave me alone!” (at least in your mind).

Or perhaps if you’re more gracious, you might do what many celebrities and public figures seem to do. You’d carry out the token gestures that’s expected of you. You’d give your perfunctory smile and wave, sign a few autographs, give a few high fives, and after a few minutes of carrying out your expected duties as a public figure, your security entourage would quickly usher you out of sight.

But that’s *not* how Jesus responds at all. Rather, he *welcomed* them.

<pause>

Let’s pause here and think about these crowds for a bit.

*What* would cause these crowds to leave their houses, shops, and daily activities to follow Jesus into a desolate place? And *what* would make them so eager to do so that they didn’t get into boats or ride animals there, but that they would run there *on foot* and even get there *ahead* of Jesus who was traveling by boat?

These were probably the crowds from the towns that the apostles proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God to. And many of these people likely heeded their message by repenting of their sins and receiving God’s reign over their hearts.

These were probably *not* the crowds from the towns that rejected the apostles and their message, but these were crowds filled with people hungering to know *more* about the kingdom of God and its King.

And when Jesus came ashore and saw the great crowds, he didn’t just perform his minimal duties as a public figure, but he stopped *everything* he had planned, he had *compassion* on them, and he went *above* and *beyond* what I’m sure *anyone* in the crowds expected from him.

As Jesus sees these crowds that are hungering and thirsting for righteousness (Matt. 5:6), as the generous *host*, he *welcomes* them (cf. Ps. 23:5-6); and as the good *shepherd* (John 10:11; cf. Ps. 23:1-4), he “feeds” them by *speaking* to them of the kingdom of God and he binds up their “wounds” by curing those who had need of healing.

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<sup>3</sup> Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008).

Verse 12 then says this:

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.”

When it says, “the day began to wear away,” we get the sense that Jesus ministered for a *long* time. This was not a 45-minute sermon, but Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God for *hours* until “the day began to wear away.”

- Think of Jesus preaching about himself as the Spirit-empowered servant of the Lord who has come to proclaim good news, liberty, and the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:16-21).
- Think of Jesus preaching his “Sermon on the Plain,” describing what it means to live in God’s kingdom (Luke 6:20-49).
- Think of Jesus’ speaking in parables, describing how the kingdom of God is only known by those who take care how they hear God’s Word (Luke 8:4-18).
- Think of Jesus declaring that he can forgive sins (Luke 5:17-26; 7:36-50).
- Think of Jesus calling sinners to repentance (Luke 5:27-32).

And just think about how *tiring* this must have been. After *I* finish preaching, I feel *exhausted*. I get stomach pains, I get winded, and I often start losing my voice. And that’s just a 45-minute sermon and I preach with a microphone! Jesus was preaching and healing for *hours* until “the day began to wear away.”

Still, the crowds are listening *intently* and their hearts are being *filled* with more and more of the good news of the kingdom of God.

But even as their *hearts* are growing *full*, their *stomachs* are growing *empty*.

As many had run on foot to get there, they probably *didn’t* carry extra food with them. And the crowds probably *didn’t* expect that Jesus would spend *all day* with them. Jesus went *above* and *beyond* what they expected.

But it’s getting late and it’s nearing the time for their evening meal around sundown,<sup>4</sup> so the apostles come to Jesus and tell him to “Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions.”

Many in the crowd would have to “find lodging” because most of the people who came to hear Jesus did *not* live anywhere near there, and it would be too dangerous for them to walk back however many miles for them to return to their homes.<sup>5</sup>

I’m sure in the minds of the apostles, sending the crowds away was the most *sensible* thing to do. But I also can’t help but think that they had some of their own *self-centered* concerns.

I’m sure the apostles were quite hungry *themselves*. After all, when Jesus sent them out before, they went out without anything but the clothes on their backs, and their ministry was so busy that they had no leisure to eat (Mark 6:31). And not only that, but they were also *already* exhausted when they got to the desolate place with Jesus, so I’m sure they just wanted to finally *rest*.

And when you’re hungry and tired, you typically don’t want to deal with any problems, especially if you don’t feel like they’re *your* problems. Perhaps the apostles were thinking, “Why should we have to take responsibility for the crowds’ hunger? We’re hungry and tired too. Let the crowds deal with their *own* problems and we’ll figure out our *own* meal.” And so, they go to Jesus and tell him, “Send them away.”

<pause>

<sup>4</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse by Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse by Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018).

Now is that how *you* typically think about problems, especially if you don't feel like they're *your* problems? "Lord, send them away! I've got enough of my *own* problems. I don't need to deal with all these *other* people's problems."

But thank God that's *not* how Jesus deals with *our* problems!<sup>6</sup> Thank God he did not leave us to figure things out ourselves. Thank God that when he saw us dead in our sins and headed for eternal punishment, he didn't say to himself, "Send them away. Let them deal with their *own* problems." Rather, he came *near* and took our sin problem upon himself to do what we could never do on our own—to live the perfect life on our behalf, to die the death we deserved for our sins, and to resurrect—so that all who believe in him as Lord and Savior can be saved from eternal death and be given eternal life.

If you're *not* a believer in Jesus Christ, you should know that God has *no* obligation to save sinners, but just like Jesus saw these unnamed people in the crowds who he owed absolutely *nothing* to, but was moved by his compassionate love to *welcome* them, he *graciously* sacrifices for and welcomes undeserving sinners, if we would only come to him with repentance for our sins and faith in him as our Lord and Savior.

We can either choose to deal with our *own* sin problem, which God says leads to eternal punishment for our sin; or we can choose *Jesus* who has *already* dealt with our sin problem in his life, death, and resurrection, which God says leads to forgiveness of our sins and eternal life with him.

I pray that you would choose eternal life in Christ and receive the salvation that he freely offers to you.

If you're *already* a believer in Jesus Christ, remember that *you* were once an unnamed member of the crowds, and yet Jesus *chose* you have *compassion* on you. He didn't leave you in your sin, but he went to the cross for you. And if that is the self-sacrificing love that we have *received* from our Lord, how could we ever look at someone else and say in our heart of hearts, "Send them away"? At the very least, there should be a loving *desire* to serve those in need and a willingness to sacrifice, even if we can't always do *all* that we wish to do for others.

<pause>

Now imagine being the apostles throughout this day of ministry with Jesus. Remember, even *before* you got in the boat, you were *already* exhausted. So when you get to the other side and you see the crowds, you're *not* excited. You don't feel like you have the energy to minister to them. But then, you look over and see *Jesus*... and he *welcomes* them.

*Every* part of you feels like you're *done* even before you started. But because *Jesus* is ministering, you *follow* Jesus and do likewise. And perhaps what you thought were just going to be a few token gestures to adequately "satisfy" the crowds ends up being an *entire day* of Jesus ministering to them—body and soul.

I'm sure that left a *profound* impression on the apostles.

Back in 2011, when HMCC of Tangerang was only two years old and HMCC of Jakarta didn't exist yet, Pastor Seth, who is currently a pastor at HMCC of Hong Kong, was coming from the US, just *passing through* Jakarta on the way to somewhere else. And when we picked him up from the airport, I'm sure he was tired and jetlagged, but he asked us to pack his schedule with spending time with people in our church.

So from 12pm until 8pm, mostly sitting at a Starbucks the entire afternoon and evening, he spent time catching up, counseling, and encouraging members of our church in their followership of Christ, including *me*. And then he took a late flight out of Jakarta *that* very night to his end destination.

And at the end of the day, when I mentioned to him how he must've been tired, he just said to me, "I'm here to serve."

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<sup>6</sup> Sean Morris, "Scandalous Grace: Jesus' Meals with Sinners: Scandalous Grace: A Feast for the Wretched," January 30, 2014, <https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/scandalous-grace-a-feast-for-the-wretched/>.

And that has left a *profound* impression on me. If the Son of Man did not come to *be* served but to *serve* (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; cf. John 13:1-17), shouldn't his followers do likewise?

Now, please do *not* misunderstand me. I am *not* advocating that we all serve, serve, and serve, where we don't know how to stop and rest.

No, what I *am* advocating for is that we take our cues from *Jesus*. Oftentimes, Jesus withdrew from the crowds to pray. And in this particular moment, Jesus had called his apostles to come *withdraw* and *rest* with him, so they were taking their cues from Jesus to *rest*.

But when they got there, Jesus saw the crowds, had compassion on them, and decided that what was necessary was to *serve* them because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34). And so, the apostles took their cues from Jesus and started to *serve* others again.

For *some* of us, we need to learn to *rest well* and *surrender* our work and ministry to the Lord. And if that's *you*, then you need to know that "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Ps. 127:1). If you *cannot* stop and rest, then perhaps you're pursuing *selfish* ambitions rather than *godly* ambitions. God is *not* a slavedriver, but he is a loving Shepherd who gives the gift of Sabbath and who makes us lie down in green pastures (Ps. 23:2), so that we can work *out of* our rest and not work *for* our rest. So again, if that's *you*, perhaps you need to take your cue from Jesus to come *withdraw* and *rest* with him.

But for *some* of us, we need to learn to *work hard* and *sacrifice* to serve others—even when we're tired, even when it's inconvenient, even when it totally disrupts everything we had planned. If we're following Jesus, we should have a mentality that "we're here to serve."

I know that so many nuances and disclaimers should probably be made about that, but all I want us to ask ourselves and be challenged by is this: "Am I taking my cues from Jesus regarding when I should *rest* and when I should *serve* others? Or am I taking my cues from someone or something else—like whatever I feel like in the moment, or whatever is least disruptive to my life?"

I'd encourage you to also ask other trusted brothers and sisters in your life who know you well what they think. Of course, everyone has different capacities and constraints, but if multiple godly brothers and sisters in your life are noticing and cautioning you about how you serve and rest, perhaps you should listen more intently, seek God in prayer, and see if there's some wisdom that Christ is imparting to you through their counsel.

Still, followers of Christ should *never* be characterized by an unwillingness to work hard.

Remember, Jesus was so tired that he was knocked out in a boat and sleeping through a violent storm. Jesus undoubtedly worked *hard*. And if we're followers in Christ, we should be characterized as those who work hard in *everything* that we do. We should work hard in our *family*; we should work hard in our *work*; we should work hard in our *church*. "*Whatever* you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col. 3:23, NIV84). "So, whether you eat or drink, or *whatever* you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

So the apostles were *exhausted*. And yet, Jesus had *compassion* on the crowds and he *served* them. *This* is how Jesus responded to and satisfied those who were hungering to know more about the kingdom of God and its King.

But it was getting late and the crowds were now hungering for *food*, so what exactly would Jesus do to satisfy them now? That's what we'll look at next.

<pause>

So first, Jesus compassionately serves; and second...

## II. Jesus completely satisfies (vv. 13-17)

Verses 13-15 say this:

<sup>13</sup> 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.” <sup>14</sup> For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” <sup>15</sup> And they did so, and had them all sit down.

Now the apostles *didn't* want to take responsibility for the crowds, but *Jesus* puts the responsibility back on them when he says, “You give them something to eat.” In the original language, the “you” is *emphatic* and a *command*—“Give to them, *you*, (something) to eat!”<sup>7</sup>

This must have been surprising for the apostles to hear for a variety of reasons. For one, prior to this, whenever there was a problem while Jesus was around, he *never* asked the apostles to do *anything*; the apostles just *observed Jesus* do something about it. *Jesus* cast out demons, *Jesus* healed the sick, *Jesus* calmed the storm, *Jesus* raised the dead.

But now, ever since he sent them out on their short missions trip, he's now *inviting* them to *participate*, even though he's still with them.

But the apostles respond, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish.” And then they *sarcastically* make the comment, “unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.”

Why was this sarcastic? Because there were five thousand men! And that wasn't even counting women and children (Matt. 14:21). *With* women and children, the estimated total would have been anywhere between 10,000 to 20,000 people.<sup>8</sup>

How in the world were they to afford to buy that much food? More than half a year's wages wouldn't be enough to buy enough bread for each of them to even get a *little* (John 6:7). And on top of that, when Jesus sent out his apostles earlier, he told them *not* to bring any money (Luke 9:2), so they don't even have any money to purchase bread. And on top of that, *even* if they had the exorbitant amount of money needed, because bread was usually baked at night and brought to be purchased at the market in the *morning*,<sup>9</sup> *nobody* was selling bread in the evening.

So how in the world could they feed the crowd? They *couldn't*. And that was the point.

Jesus wanted them to turn to *him* in dependence as they had before when they *knew* they *couldn't* proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, cast out demons, and heal the sick *on their own*.

Jesus *didn't* expect the apostles to have the power *in and of themselves* to do what he was asking, but he was asking them to be *participants* in what *he* would do. The time for *observing* Jesus doing everything *without* their involvement was over; he had *already* sent them out and he now *expected* that they would be *active participants* in his ministry.

But as the apostles faced the fact that they *couldn't* feed the crowds, they didn't immediately depend on Jesus or ask him for help as they should have, but they fixated on the fact that what Jesus was asking could *not* be done—at least not by their *own* power and resources.

And so, they got *sarcastic* with Jesus, which was really just *complaining* and *scoffing* masked in *logic*. They were basically using *their wisdom* to tell Jesus that he was *foolish*; they were using *their reason* to tell Jesus that he was *unreasonable*.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever complained and scoffed at Jesus' commands, masking it in your own logic?

<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Study notes on Matt. 14:15-21 and John 6:10-11 in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Sean Morris, “Scandalous Grace: Jesus' Meals with Sinners: Scandalous Grace: A Feast for the Wretched,” January 30, 2014, <https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/scandalous-grace-a-feast-for-the-wretched/>.

- Perhaps you complain about his command to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). After all, you're introverted and you already have your hands full with family, work, and church. Following Jesus simply isn't *feasible* at this point.
- Perhaps you scoff at his command against sexual immorality (Mark 7:21; cf. Matt. 5:27-30)—of not being sexually active with yourself or any other person outside of marriage? After all, aren't we sexual beings who *need* to let those urges come out? Following Jesus simply isn't *healthy* at this point.
- Perhaps you're sarcastic with Jesus at his commands of loving your enemies (Luke 6:27-28), turning the other cheek (Luke 6:29-30), forgiving others (Luke 17:3-4), being reconciled (Matt. 5:23-24), and treating others as you wish to be treated (Luke 6:31). After all, who does that? Following Jesus simply isn't *realistic* at this point.

We constantly bend and twist what Jesus says to us, so that it somehow doesn't apply to us. We essentially play the role of *Satan* in our own lives, saying to ourselves, "Did God actually say...?" (Gen. 3:1). We somehow convince ourselves that even though God *actually* said those things, that he didn't *really* mean it. We use our own foolish wisdom to reason out of any responsibility that God has placed on us. And like our original parents, we somehow manage to blame *God* for our own sin (Gen. 3:12).

As sinners, we're constantly tempted to justify ourselves and to condemn God. We're constantly prone to think that *we* are *right* and *God* is *wrong*.

Yet Scripture says that *Christ* is "wisdom *from* God" (1 Cor. 1:30) and "the wisdom *of* God" (1 Cor. 1:24). And "who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" (Rom. 11:34), for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

When Jesus first called Peter, James, and John, he told them to let down their fishing nets when they had just come back after not catching anything all night. It didn't make any sense to them, but then they nearly sank two boats with the amount of fish they caught (Luke 5:1-11).

When people didn't believe Jesus could forgive a paralyzed man's sins, he proved it by healing him and having everyone watch the man rise, pick up his bed, and go home (Luke 5:17-26).

When people *laughed* at Jesus when he said a dead girl was only "sleeping," he raised her from the dead and gave her back to her parents (Luke 8:49-56).

We could go on and on. *Every* time someone thought Jesus was *foolish* or even *mocked* him for what he said, he proved them wrong—100% of the time. But the apostles were slow learners—just like we are.

For us...

- How many times have we been overwhelmed by his faithfulness?
- How many times have we been comforted by his steadfast love?
- How many times have we been awestruck by his sovereignty?

Yet when faced with the various problems of life, how many times have we *forgotten* and acted like it makes *no* difference that Jesus is in our lives?

But thankfully, Jesus is patient and gracious with us—as he was here with his apostles. Rather than rebuking them and telling them to step aside, he *still* chooses to *involve* them; even though Jesus doesn't *need* his apostles, he still wants them to know the *privilege* and *joy of participating* with him in his ministry.

And so, he simply tells his disciples to have the crowds sit down in groups of fifty each.

"Maybe the disciples saw that look in Jesus' eye and remembered the other miraculous things he had done."<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the calming of the storm or the raising of the dead came to mind. Perhaps they began to

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<sup>10</sup> R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 193.



remember that Jesus being with them makes *all* the difference. We don't know for sure. All we know is that the apostles did as Jesus said.

But before we move on too quickly, I want us to notice how much *work* this must've been for them to group the five thousand men, plus many women and children, in groups of fifty each. I imagine the Twelve moving through the crowds trying to talk over other people to give instructions for everyone to group themselves into smaller groups. And have you ever tried to get such a large group to sit down? It sounds like a simple task, but when you multiply any task by five *thousand*, it's not as simple as you think. This required *work*, but it was worthwhile work, as we'll soon see.

Verse 16 then says this:

<sup>16</sup> 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.

Here, Jesus was performing the duties of a good Jewish *host* by following the customary Jewish procedure of taking the bread in his hands, pronouncing a blessing, breaking the bread, and distributing it.<sup>11</sup> Even though it was the *crowds* that followed him to the desolate place, *Jesus* takes the role of generous *host* who provides a banquet for his invited guests.

And so, as he gave the five loaves and two fish to the disciples to set before the seated crowd, the loaves and fish never ran out. Somehow, "The pieces grew under his touch, and the disciples always found his hands *full* when they came back with their own *empty*."<sup>12</sup>

But again, before we move too quickly, just imagine the apostles distributing the multiplying loaves and fish to the five thousand men, plus many women and children, and just think how *tiring* it must've been for them.

- Perhaps they're individually carrying all the food to each group of fifty sitting down.
- Perhaps they're asking for a few representative helpers from each group of fifty to come to Jesus and get the food to bring back.
- Perhaps it's a massive assembly line of just passing food.

We have no idea how it was all executed. But Jesus tasked the apostles to set the food before the crowd, and again, it was *work*. They had to figure out the *logistics*. They had to inform the crowds with *instructions*. They probably had to recruit *help*.

Although Jesus was the miraculous *Provider*, he involved unremarkable *participants*. He *actively* involved his *apostles*, and my guess is that the apostles *actively* involved people from the *crowds*. At the very least, we know from John's parallel account that the five loaves and two fish did *not* belong to any of the apostles, but it was a poor boy's meal that he offered up to them (John 6:9).<sup>13</sup> So in some sense, this was a very *participatory* miracle. Perhaps that's one of the reasons it was so well-known in the early church—because *thousands* of people *participated* in it.

<pause>

For us, this is a beautiful picture of the church. Jesus is the *head* of his body, but we are each *members* of it, and Jesus graciously calls and equips each of his members to *participate* in building up the body in greater love and maturity to resemble himself more and more (Eph. 4:11-16).

If you're a member of this church, then this isn't just the *pastor's* church, but this is *your* church. But most importantly, this is *Christ's* church. And Jesus has called and equipped *each* member in his body to *participate*—to *work hard*—in building up *his* body.

- For *some* of us, that might be serving as a leader in the church.

<sup>11</sup> R. T. France, *Luke*, TTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 161.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of the Holy Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1971), 258.

<sup>13</sup> From John's parallel account, we know it was specifically "*barley* loaves" (John 6:9), which was common food for the poor. "**Barley** was common food for the poor (the more well-to-do preferred wheat bread). The **fish** were probably dried or preserved, possibly pickled" (Study note on John 6:9 in *ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014]).

- For *many* of us, that might be serving in a ministry team or in a LIFE Group.
- But for *all* of us, that means intentionally helping others to follow Jesus.

If you're a Christian, just think about *all* the people Jesus used to lead *you* to himself.

For myself...

- I think about a particular Sunday school teacher who was kind to me and faithfully taught me about Jesus, even though I was not very compliant.
- I think about members of the church I grew up in who prayed for me long after I stopped going to the church in high school.
- I think about my dorm supervisor in university who didn't filter out his relationship with God in the conversations we had.
- I think about my two Christian roommates who constantly invited me to church and even had their small group members pray for me long before they ever met me.
- I think about my first life group leader who picked me up and drove me to LG each week, and who would talk to me about personal and spiritual things on the ride.
- I think about all the members of my life group who helped me to understand Scripture and who didn't judge me when I was cursing in life group.
- I think about those who welcomed me at the door of Sunday Celebration, who remembered my name and made me feel at home even though I was new.
- I think about the pastors who faithfully preached God's Word week-in and week-out, so that I could hear the *gospel* week-in and week-out.
- I think about all the members of the church who showed me what the gospel does to an entire community that trusts in Christ alone as Lord and Savior.

So *who* led me to Christ? It's hard to say. God used so many members of Christ's Church to lead me to himself. And my guess is that, if you're a Christian, you probably have a similar story. And if you're not a Christian yet, I hope that will become your story as well.

Verse 17 then says this:

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

Again, just like the crowds probably didn't expect Jesus to spend *all day* with them, I'm sure they didn't expect that Jesus would provide them *all* something to eat. And this wasn't just a *snack*, but this was a *feast*.

It says, "they *all* ate and were *satisfied*." They were *stuffed*. Their belts are about to *pop*; they're leaning back and belching with *satisfaction*. Jesus *always* provides what truly satisfies.

- It doesn't matter if there's only *water*; Jesus will turn it into the *best wine* (John 2:1-11).
- It doesn't matter if there's only five loaves and two fish; he'll turn it into a *satisfying feast*.

But that's *not* how the world satisfies, is it? The world tells you that you can find satisfaction in sumptuous food, sexual pleasures, work accomplishments, financial security, marital status, people's applause, but it never quite satisfies, does it? They all leave you *hungrier* than you began.

But *not* so with Jesus. "Those whom Christ *feeds* he *fills*."<sup>14</sup> (Matthew Henry). They weren't hungry anymore, but they were all *satisfied*. Listen to what the Lord says to us in...

Isaiah 55:1-2 = "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for *that which does not satisfy*? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5/mhc5.Luke.x.html>.

Jesus says to us, “*Why* do you labor for that which does *not* satisfy, when *I* freely offer to you what *will truly* satisfy? ‘*I* am the bread of life; whoever comes to *me* shall not hunger, and whoever believes in *me* shall never thirst’ (John 6:35).”

So through the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus is saying and showing us, “Only *I* can provide what *truly* satisfies.” He did not come to steal and kill and destroy, but he came that we may have *life* and have it *abundantly* (John 10:10).

Throughout Scripture, the new heavens and new earth is described as an epic, worldwide *feast* with “all peoples” enjoying “rich food” and “well-aged wine” (Isa. 25:6-8; cf. Rev. 19:9). It’s a vivid picture of unending *joy* and full *satisfaction* with God and with one another in the world that God created for us to live in.

In other words, the “eternal life” that we have through faith in Christ (John 3:16) is *not* just talking about the *quantity* of life—that we will live for all eternity after death—but it’s also talking about the *quality* of life—that we will be *truly* and *completely* satisfied. And “eternal life” is *not* just something we *wait* for, but it’s something we *have* even now. It’s “already but not yet.” We will experience it in *full* later, but we *already* have it *in part* now in Christ.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we can say in *this* life, “I count everything as loss because of the *surpassing worth* of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). We can say, “Though we do not now see him, we believe in him and *rejoice* with *joy* that is *inexpressible* and *filled with glory*” (1 Pet. 1:8).

So what about us? What are we running towards and working so hard for? More money, more vacations, more rest, more comfort and ease? Is that what we *really* believe will truly satisfy?

No, as those who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8), our lives should testify to the world around us that only *Jesus* provides what *truly* satisfies. And when we live our lives that way, our desire is that they would come to know him and give glory to him as well. Or at the very least, our desire is that they would want to know more about who Jesus is.

Now this takes us back to the question that Herod the tetrarch and everyone has been asking throughout Luke’s Gospel account so far: “Who is this Jesus?” This question is now escalating to the point of overwhelming anticipation. “Who is this Jesus who can even multiply bread and fish to provide for thousands in the wilderness?”

[<sup>17</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.]

And for the apostles and all the Jewish people in the crowds who were being fed, especially as they were sitting in groups of fifty in the desolate place (cf. Exod. 18:21, 25; Deut. 1:15), I’m sure they couldn’t help but recall *God* providing manna and quail for his people in the wilderness.

*Nobody* could do this on such a large scale in the Old Testament except *God* himself.<sup>15</sup> Thus far, this was Jesus’ “biggest” miracle in the sense that it wasn’t just experienced by an individual, a family, or a small town, but this was likely tens of thousands of people.

But little did they know that the next time Jesus would take, bless, break, and distribute bread, it would be on the night he would be arrested and later crucified “for the sins of *the whole world*” (1 John 2:2). *More* than *thousands* or even *tens* of thousands, Jesus would save “a great multitude that *no one could number*, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev. 7:9).

The feeding of the five thousand was just an *opening* act. The Last Supper would later lead into the *climax* of his crucifixion and resurrection. And as followers of Christ, the next time we will feast with Jesus will be in the *final resolution* in the new heavens and new earth with all the redeemed.

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<sup>15</sup> The prophet Elisha had a similar miracle where he multiplied *twenty* barley loaves to feed a *hundred* men (2 Kings 4:42-44), but Jesus is the *greater* Elisha who multiplied *five* barley loaves and *two* fish to feed five *thousand* men.

We're not there yet. But every time we take of the Lord's Supper as a church, it should make us *long* for that day. And even more broadly, every time we eat or drink, it should make us thankful for his provision and satisfaction along the way to that great eternal day when we will be *fully* and *truly* satisfied in him forever.

The feeding of the five thousand was just a small *taste* of that day to come, but *even* in just that taste, we see that he doesn't only satisfy us with *just* enough, but with *more than* enough. Jesus is so lavish and such a superabundant Provider that he leaves *leftovers*.

After everyone had eaten to their satisfaction, Jesus asked the twelve apostles to pick up the leftovers (again, more *work!*), and they basically each have a *full* basket for themselves (John 6:12-13). And in *each* of the apostles' baskets, they now have *more* than what they *started* with. It was Jesus' *personal* object lesson for each of them.

- Remember their exhaustion before the ministry began?
- Remember them wanting to send away the crowds?
- Remember their sarcastic complaining and doubting when Jesus asked them to serve?
- Remember all the tiring work it was to seat and distribute the food to the crowds?

As they each held a full basket in their hands, I'm sure the apostles probably realized at least two lessons.

- First, what is impossible with men is possible with *Jesus* (Luke 18:27; cf. Mark 10:27; Luke 1:37).
- Second, it was all *worth* it. All the exhaustion, all the frustration, all the tiring work—it was all worth it.

Remember, though the twelve apostles were the primary *instruments* of Jesus' service, they were *also* among the "all" who were satisfied, except they probably knew a *deeper* satisfaction. They learned that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35; cf. John 13:17).

For us, anything worthwhile will exhaust, frustrate, and tire you. And one of the most worthwhile things we could give ourselves to is *discipling*—or intentionally helping someone else to follow Jesus. The apostle Paul referred to discipling as "toil" and "struggle" (or agony) (Col. 1:29), yet he gave his life to make disciples—and he was probably one of the most joyful people this world has ever known.

If all you want is a comfortable life, you will *not* do much of anything that is worthwhile and you will *not* experience the privilege and joy and satisfaction of *participating* in Jesus' ministry.

It's been famously said that "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him" (John Piper). But just like a saving faith is evidenced in good works, a satisfied soul is also evidenced in mobilized body. It is impossible to be satisfied in God and yet slack in his ministry. Jesus invites us to *participate* in building up his body, proclaiming his gospel, and living for his glory.

The Bible has no paradigm of a Christian fully satisfied in God and yet not putting his hands to the plow. Rather, we find satisfied Christians living for their satisfying Savior, and as they do, they discover that Christ's endless well of satisfaction goes deeper still.

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him, and that satisfaction is *seen* and *increased* through faith-filled *participation* in Jesus' ministry.

As a church, may we *not* be complacent with being mere *observers* when Christ calls us to be active *participants*. May we *not* be *forgetful* of all the ways that Christ has proven himself in our lives, but may we be *faithful* to trust and obey him at his word no matter what he asks of us.

And *as* we participate in his ministry, may we find that Christ is the only one who truly satisfies us—body and soul—both in this life and in the life to come.

<pause>

Here's the...

## **Life Application**

1. Who can you serve this week? Pray regularly that God would give you opportunities and ideas to serve those in need around you.

That need could be physical, spiritual, emotional, or practical. We may not be able to do as much as we'd like, but as we take our cues from Jesus, there should be a desire to work hard to compassionately serve those around us.

2. What are you running towards and working so hard for? Repent for pursuing counterfeit satisfactions, share honestly with other brothers or sisters in Christ, and ask for prayer and help to seek true satisfaction in Christ above all else.

Perhaps you're tempted to pursue the next paycheck, the next long weekend, the next travel plans, the next relationship to work out, or something else. But you've been down that road time and time again, and it leaves you with emptier and hungrier each time.

If you're not sure what it even means or looks like to be satisfied in Jesus, perhaps start there and ask a brother or sister in our church, and that could be one of the most important conversations you could have in your own followership of Christ.

## **The One Thing**

***Only Jesus provides what truly satisfies.***

## **Conclusion**

If you're able, can we all stand as we respond to God's Word together?