

Lesson 25

Looking For God's Solutions

Icebreaker:

What would you do if you heard someone teaching the Word of God and performing signs and wonders?

Introduction:

When the disciples return from their first preaching tour in late March,¹ Jesus takes them with him to Bethsaida.² But doing the work of the ministry in Bethsaida is so overwhelming they don't have time to eat. So Jesus suggests they get in the boat and go away by themselves for a little rest and relaxation ... to some quiet place.

However, casting out demons, healing people and performing signs and wonders tends to attract crowds. Running along the lakeshore people follow the boat's progress and arrive before it puts into shore. Despite His weariness Jesus has compassion on the crowd and spends the remainder of the day teaching them.

Reading The Scripture:

Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:3-14

The Apostles Return

Matthew 14:13-14, Mark 6:30-34, Luke 9:10-11, and John 6:1-4

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

And the apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. And taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. And the people saw them going, and many recognized them, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

Jesus Feeds 5,000 Men

Matthew 14:15-23, Mark 6:35-46, Luke 9:12-17, and John 6:5-16

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And the day began to decline, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" And they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two

¹ Late March appears to be the correct time period as John 6:4 records that the Passover of the Jews was approaching. That year it would have fallen in early April.

² Bethsaida or "House of fishing" was a city located about three miles east of Capernaum on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee where the Jordan River empties into it. Bethsaida was the hometown of Andrew, Peter and Philip.

hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" Jesus therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." And He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" And He said, "Bring them here to Me." And He said to His disciples, "Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each." And they did so, and had them all recline. Now there was much grass in the place. And they reclined in companies of hundreds and of fifties. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost." And they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. And there were about **five thousand men** who ate, aside from women and children. When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, immediately made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to **Bethsaida**, while He Himself was sending the multitude away. And after bidding them farewell, He departed to the mountain to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

Five thousand men. The total number of people that Jesus fed that day could easily have been in excess of 20,000.

Bethsaida. A town near Capernaum which was the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip.

The Commands:

1. Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.
2. You give them something to eat.
3. How many loaves do you have? Go look!
4. Bring them here to Me.
5. Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each.
6. Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost.

Group Discussion:

1. How often should you take a break from doing the work of the ministry?

The Lesson:

New ministry lessons are in store for the disciples. During their missionary journeys the disciples had been focused on the instructions that Jesus gave them about going into the harvest field. Now they are confronted with doing ministry in an impromptu setting.

Let's begin by saying that God is not a taskmaster. He doesn't drive His people hard. Jesus recognized His disciple's need for rest and relaxation and commanded them to take some. Many people involved in church ministries actually burn themselves out because they won't take a break.

Their failure usually is related to an issue of pride. It might be because they believe the ministry that God has given them can't do without them for a minute (self importance). Or there is no one

else to do the work (God has failed to provide). Or perhaps, they are only pleasing to God when they are doing the work of the ministry (God is a taskmaster).

God does not condone laziness but He also doesn't want His people to be workaholics either. That is why He made so many occasions in the Bible that required them to rest:

- One day a week.
 - Seven holidays each year.
 - Three vacations per year:
 - Spring, 8 days plus travel time,
 - Summer, 2 days plus travel time, and
 - Fall, 8 days plus travel time.
 - The whole year off on every seventh year.
 - Also the whole year off every fiftieth year.
- And those were just the required rest periods!

Group Discussion:

2. How do you react when you are faced with an overwhelming sense of need?

The Lesson Continued:

As the disciples become aware of the physical needs of the people that are being taught, they approach Jesus with their concerns. Their first solution like many of ours is to send the people away letting them make provision for their own needs. It's a prudent and reasonable idea. "Let everyone be self-reliant and own their own stuff." In America, we might call this the Republican way.

But Jesus puts a stop to that idea right away. He commands His disciples, "*You give them something to eat.*" He wants the disciples to accept personal responsibility for these people's needs. And perhaps it answered for them the age-old question, "*Am I my brother's keeper*" (Genesis 4:9). From His response, Jesus evidently believed the way of love was expressed by helping those in need.

Accepting their personal responsibility the disciples present Jesus with an alternative solution. The solution like many of ours is to spend our own money in order to meet the people's needs. Surely this is a prudent and reasonable idea. "Let us accept are social responsibility and throw some money at it." In America, we might call this the Democratic way.³

But Jesus puts a stop to that idea as well by forcing the disciples to think through the situation logically. Since they are out in the middle of nowhere he asks, "*Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?*" In other words:

- Do you remember it is late in the day?
- Since we are in a remote location where are you going to go to get the bread?
- Can you get enough bread for all these people to eat in one town or will you have to go to several towns?
- Which towns will you go to?

³ The solutions the disciples gave Jesus illustrate the two primary ways which people handle the needs of others. This is clearly evident in the two-party dominated American political system of the 21st century. The result of this is that Democrats accuse Republicans of not having a heart and Republicans accuse Democrats of not having a brain.

- Is there a grocery store in the town or will you have to beg for bread from door to door?
- If you buy bread who takes the money if your going to different towns?
- Then how will you transport the bread back here?

Finally, Philip grasps the enormity of the situation when he replies, "*Two hundred denarii⁴ worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.*" Bless Philip's heart. He was willing to spend all the money they had to meet the needs of the people but even he saw the futility of the idea. After spending the money they would not be able to care for themselves, promote the work of the ministry or meet future needs.

Having heard the disciple's solutions for meeting the needs of others, Jesus provides His own solution. It follows a familiar pattern, living by faith:

- Ask – for a revelation or word from God. This is called a rhema: a personal revelation or word from God to an individual in a situation. It is like asking for help and waiting for the answer.
 - Jesus knew what he was going to do. *And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.*
- Seek – speak God's plan to others looking for the resources to accomplish it.
 - *"How many loaves do you have? Go look!"*
 - *"Bring them here to Me."*
 - *And He said to His disciples, "Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each."*
- Knock – take action on God's plan trusting that He will fulfill His word to you.
 - Thank God for His provision. *And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food.*
 - Do what He told you to do.
 - *And broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all.*
 - *"Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost." And they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish.*

Besides demonstrating the primary pattern of obtaining provision for needs, Jesus also teaches His disciples some other principles through His commands. Lets examine them. When Jesus said, "*How many loaves do you have? Go look!*" He is indicating that when a need arises look to the resources that God has already provided to meet the specific need.

In saying, "*Bring them here to Me.*" Jesus is stating that He wants His disciples to bring their resources to Him. As Lord of heaven and earth He can multiply even the smallest of resources to meet their need.

Jesus had His disciples group the men by fifties and one hundreds following the Old Testament pattern of serving people. The basic groupings were tens, fifties, one hundreds, and one thousands and there was one leader for each group who served the people. For example when ten men could be found a synagogue was established and the elder appointed.

⁴ Evidently this is the amount of money that they had in their "bank account".

It is always appropriate to thank God for His provision as meager as it may appear. *“And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food.”*⁵

Then Jesus started giving away what He had and in His giving what He had was multiplied. This comes from the Law of “sowing and reaping”.

- **“Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For *by your standard of measure* it will be *measured to you in return.*”** (Luke 6:38)
- **Now this I say, he who *sows sparingly* will also *reap sparingly*, and he who *sows bountifully* will also *reap bountifully*. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for **God loves a cheerful giver**. And **God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have abundance for every good deed; as it is written, “HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.”** Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food **will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.** (2 Corinthians 9:6-12)**
- Notice, Jesus gave away all that He had.

Finally, Jesus told His disciples to gather up what was left over. He wants the disciples to recognize that whatever God supplies, He does so for a reason. So don't waste His provision. Even though they may not see an immediate need for the surplus at the moment it has a purpose in the future.

Group Discussion:

3. Who were the people around Jesus and what did He feed them? (Luke 4:18)
 - Poor “preached the gospel (good news)”
 - Captives “proclaimed release”
 - Blind “proclaimed recovery of sight”
 - Downtrodden “proclaimed freedom”
4. Who are the people around you?
5. How does it make you feel when you realize that you have special gifts to contribute to the world's needs?

The Point Of The Lesson:

God wants to use you to bless people and glorify His name.

Application:

Minister to the people around you.

⁵ “He blessed the food.” In reality the provision (food) is never blessed, God is blessed through the giving of thanks for His provision.