

TEXT SERMONS
DISCIPLESHIP SERIES

Theme Verse: “If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

MESSAGE #12

“EMPLOYMENT IN DISCIPLESHIP”

Mark 6:32-44

“When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, “This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.” But He answered and said to them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to Him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?” But He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they found out they said, “Five, and two fish.” Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all. So they all ate and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.”

For every privilege there is a corresponding responsibility. It is a holy and high privilege to be numbered among the disciples of Jesus Christ. What a privilege to company with the Christ as we journey on our earthly pilgrimage from our house here to His house in heaven! We are not celebrities, we are servants. And while we walk, there is work to do. A good example of one of the duties of discipleship is seen in the story in Mark chapter six.

There are several major interest stories encapsulated in this hillside picnic. There is:

- *The Master Who prepared it;* He is the attraction, the reason the people are away from home at suppertime;
- *The miracle that He performed;* I hope you are yet intrigued by miracles;
- *The methodology Jesus promoted.* Not only what Jesus said was instructive, but what He did and how He did it was instructive as well. God’s methods with men are always enthralling.
- *The ministry He was perpetuating.* This super-snack had its immediate purpose but it also had its far-reaching purpose. Jesus was not only teaching and training the twelve but He had us in mind as well. With this last thought in mind, let us analyze this miracle. The miracle unfolds as follows:

I. THE PEOPLE IN NEED. Vs.35-36

“When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, “This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.”

A. It Was An Immense Need.

Verse 44 tells us there were “about 5,000 men.” In Matthew’s account of the same event, he writes, “Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides

women and children.” (Matt.14:21) Mark only reports on the number of men present, Matthew adds that there were women and children. There could have been 10,000 present, or even more. To feed even 5,000 hungry men without any previous planning and no food available was a humanly impossible task, to say nothing of the addition of wives and children. To say that the need is immense is no exaggeration.

The masses of humanity world-wide need the Bread of Life. The need is immense, just as Jesus stated, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers *are* few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Matt.9:37-38)

B. It Was An Individual Need.

Every person present needed food. Personal attention must be given to each one. The sick gather in hospitals but the doctor must tend to each one personally. The trend in ministry in our day is to minister to those who gather as a flock on Sunday but ignore the wandering sheep during the week. Evangelistic methodology is also trending in the same direction. There is a place for “mass evangelism” but we must not neglect personal evangelism.

C. It Was An Immediate Need.

The hour was late, the crowd large, the hunger real and the food supply non-existent. No wonder the disciples were concerned. “When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, “This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.” (Mark 6:35,36)

This is the dilemma that confronted the disciples. They were alarmed, but not Jesus. He was not taken by surprise. He had a purpose for being in that place at that time with that need before Him. Remember, the disciples were in the Discipleship School and what a lesson they were to learn that day!

II. THE PRECEPT TO HEED.

The disciples came to Jesus and said, “send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread.” Notice what Jesus said to them: “You give them something to eat.” (v.37)

The disciples were immediately confronted with a human impossibility. They did not have either food or funds to meet the demand of such a crowd. Jesus’ command was no doubt meant to cause them to look to God for the solution to the crisis with which they were confronted. There would be other humanly impossible situations confronting them that would test their faith. Did Jesus permit this emergency to develop in order to train His disciples and reveal His credentials to the populace?

A. This Was A Divine Precept.

The command of Jesus to “give them something to eat” not only expressed Jesus’ concern but caused the disciples to see this exigency as an opportunity for ministry. After all, ministry was what they were to be doing the remainder of their earthly lives.

B. This Was A Direct Precept.

“You give them something to eat.” That was plain, pointed and personal. He wanted them to get involved in solving the emergency with which they were faced. Slowly they were being taught as apprentices to Jesus. Here they had here an opportunity to get hands-on experience in meeting human needs with divine resources.

Our ministry is not any different than was the disciples. We have a world of hungry people – both physical and spiritual hunger. Are you involved in meeting the need or are you like so many who just go about pointing out the need and saying, “Isn’t the world’s situation bad!”

C. This Was A Definitive Precept.

“Give them something *to eat.*” It was food they needed. In the preceding verses we read, “And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things. When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, “This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. *Send them away*” (Mark 6:34-36)

Jesus saw the people as “sheep not having a shepherd” and “was moved with compassion for them.” The disciples saw a crowd of hungry people and said, “send them away.” Jesus used this situation to instill in the disciples compassion.

It has been frequently stated that a soul-winner is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. I would modify that statement by saying, a soul-winner is one beggar giving the Bread of Life to another beggar! The greatly compassionate are the genuinely converted.

Illust. Mrs. Jennings and I were in Sao Paulo, Brazil ministering and staying in the home of missionaries. The homes there are surrounded by security walls or wrought iron fences so that one cannot walk up to a house and knock on the door. Our host missionaries were trying to reach the people in their neighborhood and minister to them but could not gain access to homes because of the walls and fences.

The lady missionary was impressed to bake loaves of bread and take them to the gates of the houses and clap her hands, as was the custom, to attract the attention of the occupants. When neighbors responded she gave them a loaf of bread. One neighbor received the bread and invited the missionary into her home. The result was that the neighbor invited her and her husband to have Bible studies in their home. The husband, wife and children came to faith in Christ because of a loaf of bread.

Jesus wants all His disciples to get involved in the Bread Brigade! “You give them something to eat” is still His precept for today.

III. THE PLAN TO FEED. vs.39-42

Jesus had no wrist watch, however, He was not unaware of the time of day. He knew there were no restaurants in the vicinity and that the crowd that had been following him

most of the day had to eat. Therefore, we are driven to one conclusion: He had a plan. Remember, what God does is always wonderful; how He does it is marvelous; when He does it is amazing. God always has a time-table. He works according to His agenda, not ours. An obvious example is in Galatians: “When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

Jesus was teaching His disciples to trust Him. If they could not and would not trust Him while He was physically present with them, it is not likely that they would trust Him when He went back to heaven. So here they were out in the rural country-side, late in the evening with a hungry crowd on their hands. What to do? It is very interesting to follow the sequence of the actions Jesus instructed the disciples to take.

A. The Organization.

“Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.” (vs.39-40)

Sit! “make them all sit down .” Jesus is the great psychologist. He knew how to control a crowd. How? Get them off their feet and on to their seat!

Sit in groups! “sit down in groups.” – “So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.” He was arranging the crowd so that the disciples could move among them to distribute the food.

Sit in comfort! “on the green grass.” I find it interesting that those words are included in Jesus’ instructions to the disciples.

Jesus was an Organizer. I have been in churches that could use the principles in this story to become more efficient in serving the people who congregate. God is orderly. His handiwork reveals forethought, planning, strategy and organization. A look at the universe or our bodies is ample evidence of good organization.

B. The Operation.

“And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all.” (v.41)

After Jesus had taken the boy’s lunch and turned it into a feast, He “gave them to His disciples to set before them.” Jesus did not miraculously multiply the fish and bread and make a pile of each, saying to the crowd, “Come and get it!” What bedlam would have ensued, what a mess they would have had! Instead, the disciples borrowed twelve baskets from mothers who had brought their babies and with the baskets served the fish and bread to the people sitting in organized groups all over the hillside.

What a laboratory this was in which the disciples, and us as well, could learn lessons

about ministering to the needs of people. And the greatest need is the need for the Bread of Life. Please pass the Bread!

B. The Overage. v.43

“And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish.”

After “they all ate and were filled” (v.42) the disciples gathered up twelve baskets of leftovers. I like to think that each disciple had a basket of food for his service that day. But that is really beside the point – the main point is that this was just like God: He always does “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” (Eph. 3:20)

SUMMATION

We must not overlook the lad with the lunch. There are four parties involved in this picnic: the crowd, Jesus, the little boy and the disciples. We must not lose the boy in the crowd; he is key to the developments. David Shultz wrote about “Sack Lunch Miracles” as follows:

“The young lad watched, unbelieving.

It was incredible!

He hadn’t thought his sack lunch would really help much.

But the man was kind, and said he could use it.

Now he was breaking the bread and passing his lunch around.

And passing it, and passing it, and passing it!

When would it stop?

Men, women, children were eating. Hundreds of them, thousands!

He tugged at the disciple’s sleeve.

“Yes, lad?”

“Mister?” His voice betrayed his wonder. “If He can do that with a Sack lunch, think what He could do if I gave him everything!”

CONCLUSION

In the chapter the disciples witnessed a marvelous miracle – the multiplication of the bread and fish by Jesus in order to feed a massive crowd of hungry people. We often say, “Jesus fed 5,000 people.” More accurately, Jesus prepared the meal, the disciples fed it to the people. And that is the point I am emphasizing in this message: the disciples were employed in passing the bread!

Here is a wonderful model of the divine-human cooperative. Jesus does what the disciples could not do – provide a miracle meal, and the disciples did what they could to assist – they passed the bread. How would you like to pass miracle bread? That is precisely what the Lord wants us to do – pass the Bread of Life! This is the employment in which every disciple of Jesus should be engaged. Please pass the Bread!

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