



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Jesus Calls Participants to be Partners (Luke 9:10-17)

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In Luke's gospel narrative we have arrived at a familiar account, possibly one of the best known of Jesus' miracles. The feeding of the five thousand, as it is commonly known, is a grand demonstration of divine power. Its importance is readily understood because it is the only miraculous event outside the resurrection that is recorded in each of the four gospels. Also, its sheer magnitude sets it apart from the others as the climax of Jesus' ministry of miracles; its purpose was to produce faith in his disciples. Throughout this gospel, the question that has been asked repeatedly concerning Jesus is, "Who then is this?" In the previous account, even Herod, after learning of the impact of Jesus' ministry asks this question. Immediately following the feeding of this multitude and their withdrawal Jesus poses two questions to his disciples on the same subject: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" and "Who do you say I am?" Peter's answer to this question lays the foundation upon which Jesus will build his church with the promise that the very gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). This is why it is so imperative that those who seek to follow Jesus understand the importance of answering this question correctly, and then the implication of basing one's life on this truth claim.

While the astounding nature of this event draws our attention, it is important not to neglect the context into which Jesus acts. The disciples fresh off their first taste of ministry work appear no different in their outlook, especially when confronted with the uncertainty of Jesus' ministry. They had returned from proclaiming the word and healing the infirm. The impact was felt to such an extent it had reached the ears of Herod. There can be little doubt the twelve, who after their returned were identified as apostles, had been effective in extending the work of Jesus to the towns and villages to which Jesus had sent them. And yet, after the times of encouragement that came from ministering for Jesus, there was something missing. They were committed to Jesus, willing to obey his commands, willing to proclaim the message of the kingdom, and willing to face opposition for the sake of their master; however, in this moment, when it was their time with Jesus, the only thought that consumed the twelve was, "send the crowds away."

The joy that came by participating with Jesus and the other disciples in ministry has given way to selfishness. They could no longer view the needs of the crowd apart from the impact that this new found responsibility would have upon their lives. Jesus' command, "give them something to eat" is spoken only after the disciples seek to usher the crowds away. The twelve have become sensitive to the needs of the people, but the effort of providing for these needs of so many seemed too great an obstacle. Jesus' command seeks to take the twelve from being mere participants to partners in the ministry. Participating with Jesus in ministry is only the first step down the path of the commitment necessary for true partnership. Jesus expects his followers to not only perceive the needs of others, but also seek to meet those needs on the basis of God's provision and Jesus' power.

Luke 9:10-17 - (10) On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. (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. (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 JOY OF PARTICIPATION

The apostles told him all that they had done – There must have been great excitement as the group gathered and started sharing with one another what had transpired during their brief mission excursion. Maybe they spoke about the things they shared concerning the kingdom, the questions asked and the excitement of those who heard and responded to the message. One can almost hear the joy in their voices in recounting how they healed the infirm through the power granted them. They probably told of the generosity of the people, the homes they stayed in and how the Lord had provided for them in each location. There were probably those who had experienced opposition from towns who had rejected the message of the kingdom, and the disciples would have related how they obeyed Jesus' command by shaking the dust off their feet to testify against those communities. In this moment of reflection what may have happened, maybe for the first time, and possibly only for an instant, was the sense of being part of something larger, something eternal. They understood that they were not alone on this journey, but shared in this ministry with Jesus and others. By obeying Jesus' command they not only experienced the joy of living in obedience to the Son of God, but began forging a bond with each other whose foundation was not build upon the shifting sands of personal affinity, but the rock of living on the basis of a divine relationship and purpose. However, this was not the end of their journey, but simply another step toward becoming fellow partners in the gospel with Jesus.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS AT 8:00AM, ROOM 100 RYAN BUILDING

Pennsylvania

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THE CHALLENGE OF PARTNERSHIP

And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida – In the midst of their dialogue, Jesus makes the decision to spend some time away from the crowds. Mark’s gospel helps fill in some details; he makes mention that many were coming and going, and due to this activity they had “no leisure to eat” (Mark 6:31). Understanding the need to rest, the Lord initiates time away from the hectic nature of the ministry and seeks to spend some time with the disciples in going to the town of Bethsaida to further debrief. This was the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip, and so, for a handful of disciples, the anticipated journey back to familiar surroundings must have been a welcome change. They travel by boat to their destination, and as they are sailing alone with their master, they are likely looking forward to this period of time when they will have the Lord’s undivided attention.

When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them – How quickly things change with Jesus; this time of rest away from the crowd becomes an enormous gathering in a remote location. The disciples disembark from the boat only to find that this promised time away has changed; the crowd had rushed ahead of the boat and are there waiting for the arrival of Jesus. This is probably the last thing the disciples wanted, but as they look to Jesus to gauge his response to the crowds’ unquenchable need, they see him welcome them. Jesus’ response to this growing assembly is the pattern that has been witnessed throughout his ministry; he speaks of the kingdom and he heals. This continues until late in the day, the hope of relaxing with Jesus has turned into a day like many others, where Jesus willingly gives himself to all who come to him. Yet, the growing thought in the back of the disciples’ minds is not amazement at Jesus’ sacrificial service, but the growing burden the crowds have become to them in this situation.

The twelve came and said to him, “Send the crowd away – What was going through the minds of these men in order to present their assessment of this alarming situation. The amount of collaboration necessary to come to a united decision stands out in this account. It was not only one or two of the disciples who proposed this plan, but the entire group. This type of consensus does not happen without discussing this topic among the group away from prying ears. You have to figure there are at least one or two tender souls among the twelve that keep the others at bay until no conceivable excuse could be made for Jesus’ irresponsibility. The hour was late and all were in agreement that the crowds must be approached in this manner. The disciples’ self-focused mindset is a constant reminder of the temptation each person faces to live a compartmentalized life. We order our lives to such an extent that the spiritual and secular no longer intersect. I do

spiritual things at a specific time in a specific location. Jesus shatters these barriers for all who would follow him. He calls us to a life in which he, his ministry, and purpose infiltrates every area of life and thought. Every moment is meant to be redeemed, truly a higher calling for those who profess Jesus as Lord.

RESPONSIBLE TO ACT

You give them something to eat. – The disciples have already made known their plan to Jesus on how the needs of food and lodging for this large multitude should be met. Now Jesus reveals his own plan. It was actually quite simple; the disciples were to give them something to eat. As they picked their proverbial “jaws off the ground” they proceeded to explain to Jesus how this thought was completely unrealistic. They had just come off a mission trip in which they were forbidden, by Jesus himself, to bring a bag, bread, or money. So, on hand, they had a simple box lunch, five loaves and two fish. As far as buying food, it is probable they had no money on-hand. Is Jesus being unreasonable here? Not at all, it is another moment when Jesus seeks to take the disciples to the next step in their journey of faith. It is a step that requires them to move from participation to partnership. The disciples were quite aware of the people’s needs; in fact, they demonstrated this by developing their own plan, “send the people away.” What they lacked was a willingness to take ownership of this problem. In asking the disciples to feed this throng, Jesus is saying to them and all his followers, the needs that you perceive in individual’s lives are the needs you are responsible to meet. A participant sees the needs, but makes excuses why they cannot possibly be met. But the partner understands it is God who has opened their eyes to take ownership, to become a vehicle of God’s provision.

JESUS’ ABUNDANT PROVISION

He looked up to heaven and said a blessing – The situation had not changed, the impossibility of the task given the limited supply still remained. However, the feeding of the 5,000 declared that Jesus has the power to take what God has provided and work miraculously to meet needs. Jesus begins by involving the disciples; he charges them with the task of organizing the crowd into groups suitable for lodging and food distribution. Then the Lord acknowledges the Father, thanks him for his provision, and continuously breaks bread for the disciples to distribute. Each time they came back for more food the disciples were reminded of the magnitude of Jesus’ creative power, and its availability to those committed to partnering with him.

Stein, Robert H. Luke. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992. p 271.