

The Disciples' Preaching Mission; The Feeding of the 5,000

Luke 9:1-17

Luke 9:1-17: Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. 2 He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. 3 And He said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece. 4 "Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. 5 And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them." 6 So they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. 7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Him; and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, 8 and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again. 9 Herod said, "John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?" So he sought to see Him. 10 And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done. Then He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. 11 But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing. 12 When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here." 13 But He said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people." 14 For there were about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of fifty." 15 And they did so, and made them all sit down. 16 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude. 17 So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them.

Background Notes

There are a few more details about the preaching mission of the twelve disciples in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Mark tells us that the Lord sent the apostles out in pairs (Mark 6:7), and in Matthew's Gospel we learn that the Lord told the apostles to limit their ministry to the Jews only (Matthew 10:5-7). Why did the Lord give these instructions? The disciples were to go to the Jews only because, at this point in our Lord's ministry, the earthly Kingdom of the Messiah that had been predicted in the Old Testament prophecies was being offered to Israel.

"The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" This was the message preached by John the Baptist, and this was the message that the Twelve were to preach. The message was to be backed with power. Demons would be cast out and the sick would be healed. The Kingdom of Heaven was at hand - would Israel accept the King and His Kingdom? Would the nation receive Jesus as the promised Messiah? We know the answer. The King and His Kingdom were rejected by

Israel. Now the gospel of God's grace goes out to the whole world, as the Lord directed in His Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20.

Although the Lord's instructions to the disciples at that time were specifically for the presentation of the Kingdom to the Jewish nation, they include principles for preaching the gospel today. There are 4 principles for preaching the gospel and 4 principles for ministry in our doctrinal points.

Doctrinal Points

1. There are divine principles for preaching the gospel.

Principle #1 - **Travel light.** *"And He said to them, 'Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece'(v3).* "Travel light" is a good principle for Christian living, and for preaching the gospel as well. The more stuff you have, the harder it is to concentrate on your mission, because you'll be concerned about all your accumulated stuff. Stay streamlined. Travel light.

Principle # 2 - **Stay put.** *"Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart"(v4).* Stay put. Once you get set up, put your energies to work in getting the gospel proclaimed, not in moving to bigger and better accommodations. This doesn't mean that you can't change locations, but let the Lord open those doors. You concentrate on your mission, not on your lodging. Stay put.

Principle # 3 - **Don't force people.** *"And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them"(v5).* Don't force people. If people don't want to hear and receive the gospel, don't force it down their throats. They are free to reject the message. In that culture, "shaking the dust off your feet" meant the possibility of fellowship had ended. Don't force people.

Principle # 4 - **Report back.** *"And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done"(v10).* Report back. We are to report back to the Lord in prayer, and let Him guide us and encourage us. In the book of Acts, the apostles practiced this principle by reporting back to the local church and to the Lord's people there who had sent them out to preach the gospel. Report back.

We can apply our Lord's directives to His disciples in that day to preaching the good news today. There are divine principles for preaching the gospel.

2. There are divine principles for ministering to many.

There are divine principles for ministering to many people in the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. Other than the resurrection, this miracle is the only one of our Lord's miracles that is recorded in all four Gospels. In this miracle there are principles for running a ministry where lots of people are involved – and really for any ministry.

Principle #1 - Give bread. This principle speaks of the need for *both* physical bread and spiritual bread. People have spiritual needs. Just as the Lord healed their diseases and gave them literal bread, so we should minister to the physical needs of hurting people wherever we can. But people also need spiritual bread for their hungry souls. Notice that the Lord welcomed them, and then He began to speak to them about the Kingdom of God (v11). John 6 says that the Lord gave His Bread of Life discourse to these same crowds. We too need to minister to the souls of people, as well as to their bodies. Give bread.

Principle #2 - Get organized. We see in verse 14 that the Lord had His disciples organize the people in groups of fifty. You can't minister to large groups of people if your ministry is not organized. Ask the Lord for guidance as you grow.

Principle #3 - Glorify Christ. The disciples brought the five loaves and two fish to the Lord, and He blessed them and multiplied them. The disciples did not try to "steal the show" from the Lord - they only helped by passing out the bread. What about us? When you find yourself ministering to large numbers of people, it's very tempting to enjoy the popularity and limelight, even thinking: "This is **my** ministry" or "This is **my** prosperous and growing church!" Be careful. Keep the spotlight on the Lord! Glorify Christ!

Principle #4 - Gather leftovers. Don't waste anything. In large ministry programs, with many donations flowing in, it's very easy to take the money for granted - and gradually begin to waste the Lord's money. The Lord will supply the legitimate needs of ministries, but He expects us not to waste. So – "gather up the leftovers!"

From the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, we've seen divine principles for ministry to many. There are divine principles for ministering to many.

Practical Application

1. Don't pass the point of no return.

In verses 7-9, when Herod tried to see the Lord, he was unsuccessful. Why? Because Herod was only curious. He had no intention of repenting for his sin, and thus God did not allow Herod to find Jesus. Herod did finally get to see the Lord in Jerusalem when our Lord was on trial, but Jesus would not speak a word to Herod. Herod had silenced the voice of God to him when he beheaded John the Baptist, and Herod had passed the point of no return.

God is gracious, but it is possible to reject God once too often. In Genesis 6:3 God said, *“My Spirit shall not strive with man forever.”* When a person continually rejects the Lord and the gospel, a hardening process sets in. It becomes more and more difficult – and then impossible - to repent. Proverbs 29:1 says, *“He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”* Don’t pass the point of no return.

2. Let’s use our interruptions as opportunities.

We’ve all had the experience of having our busy schedules interrupted, or our carefully laid out plans for the future disrupted. Generally we don’t like these interruptions - whether it’s a small interruption, like being stuck next to an overly talkative stranger on a plane when we have work to do, or a major interruption, like our vehicle breaking down when we’re on a business trip or family vacation. What do we do when interruptions occur? As believers, we should try to follow the example of our Lord and use them as opportunities to witness and to minister to the needs of people. Look at verses 10-11 to see how the Lord used this interruption as an opportunity to minister to peoples’ needs.

The Lord had taken the disciples on a little rest and relaxation retreat when they returned from a busy preaching mission, but soon they were interrupted by the multitudes. Notice that this interruption didn’t cause the Lord to become angry or rattled! He welcomed these folks, and then He began to minister to both their physical and spiritual needs.

And He expected His disciples to minister to the people, as we see in the feeding of the 5,000. Then they too used the interruption as an opportunity to serve – and the Lord expects us to do the same. Let’s use our interruptions as opportunities.

As most of you know, I recently experienced a completely unexpected interruption: coronary artery bypass surgery – a major interruption to the plans that I had! Well, praise the Lord, I was able to use this interruption as an opportunity to share the gospel with my cardiologist, my surgeon, and a hospital roommate. Let’s use our interruptions as opportunities.