

# The Key to Serving

## Luke Series #27

Luke 9:10-17

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Please turn to Luke 9:10-17. Before we look into God's Word, let's pray.

Lord, we do pray You would send Your Spirit to open our eyes to understand Your Word. Let Your Spirit cleanse, renew, exhort, revive and convict us as needed and fill, control and guide me that I might faithfully preach Your Word to the glory of Your great name. Amen.

As we continue in worship, we'll be looking at Luke 9:10-17. Before we do, I want to ask you a question. Have you ever considered how our culture influences your understanding of Christianity and the Bible? My conviction is that if you have never considered this, most likely our culture is influencing you in ways you do not realize. You think your interpretations and understanding are based on the Word of God when they might actually be based on what is happening in our culture. This often takes place.

There are two 'isms' that permeate our culture and influence us, no matter in what sphere of life we are.

1. **Skepticism.** Skepticism used to mean you had doubts or questions and wanted to talk, debate and work through the issues so you could understand them. Today, skepticism has come to mean you don't trust religion or Christianity. You see religion in general and Christianity in particular as probably the main reason for all the major problems in the world today. There is no interest in debate or discussion; rather you don't want anything to do with religion.
2. **Individualism.** I'm sure we are all familiar with this as it comes in many different forms. Individualism says, "It's all about me—what I think, feel, need and understand. It's not about the church, the church's teaching or Christ. It doesn't make any difference to me how others in the past have interpreted these things."

These two 'isms' actually drive some of the interpretations of our text. We're going to see that the main purpose of Luke 9:10-17 is to see Christ's sufficiency as the Source of provision for all our service in the Kingdom of God. Although this affects me, it is not about me but about Christ. It is not about debating and rejecting but about understanding Christ.

1. We will look at the larger context of Luke to see how we have arrived at Luke 9:10.
2. We will look at the specific context of Luke 9:10-17.
3. We will look at John 6—the ‘practical context’ which explains the meaning and purpose of these verses. You don’t have to buy a book, read a blog or an issue of Christianity Today to understand Luke 9:10-17. You need to read and understand God’s explanation of Luke’s passage in John 6.

## The Larger Context of Luke

We are going to go back to Luke 8:22-25 and work our way toward our sermon text. In this passage, a question is raised. It is my conviction that this question drives the rest of Luke 8, as well as Luke 9.

*One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they set out, and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, “Where is your faith?” And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” (Luke 8:22-25)*

It is significant that the storm was so bad disciples fear death even though they are seasoned fisherman. They ask Jesus to save them and He asks them, “*Where is your faith?*” He merely speaks and the winds and waves become still. In fear and amazement, the disciples ask a significant question: “Who is this that he can speak and the storm is still?”

Luke 8:26-39 is a large section which also brings this question to the fore. It is answered in a way we might not be expecting. Jesus comes upon a man who is possessed by many demons and He asks the demons their name. They answer “*Legion*” (verse 30), for they were many. Jesus casts the demons into a herd of pigs that run off a cliff and drown in the sea. How do you think people would react to this scene—seeing the demoniac clothed and in his right mind? We would expect them to be amazed and praise God, right? Wrong. “*Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear*” (Luke 8:37). They basically say, “We don’t care who this Guy is. Please leave.” One of the probable reasons they are fearful is because He is destroying their economy in causing the herd of pigs to drown. When you begin messing with the economy and saying that Jesus is concerned with how you spend your money, people become afraid and don’t like to hear that. These people don’t want to hear more about Who He is.

In Luke 8:40-56 we see Jesus raising one person from the dead and healing another. How do we understand this in the context of Who Jesus is? Jesus answers this question in verse 50. People are saying, “Don’t bother Jesus.” *“But Jesus on hearing this answered him [Jairus], ‘Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.’”* Jesus answers the question of Who He is by saying, “I’m the Person you should believe in and trust because no matter your situation, difficulty or problem, I can help you.” That doesn’t mean He will solve all your problems and give you everything you dream of, but it does mean He can sustain and help you in your situation. Do we really believe Jesus will do that?

In Luke 9:1-6 we see Jesus as authoritative Leader. Notice Luke 9:1-2, *“And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”* Christ is in charge and is the Leader Who sends, giving authority and power.

We find the most interesting section about Who Jesus is in Luke 9:7-9. Here we see Herod—the governor of the region—perplexed and puzzled, trying to figure out Who Jesus is. He has heard rumors that Jesus is an Old Testament prophet raised from the dead or even John the Baptist. Herod must be nervously thinking: “I killed John the Baptist by cutting off his head! Who is this Jesus?”

We see the same confusion in the politics of our day. Politicians cannot figure out Who Jesus is or if He has anything to say in the realm of politics. The answer in our day is to keep quiet and not say anything about Jesus’ impact on politics in order to avoid making waves. Yet Jesus has something to say about every area of life. The question, “Who is Jesus?” is still being asked and answered in numbers of ways.

## **The Specific Context of Luke 9:10-17**

In this passage, Jesus responds to question of Who He is by performing a miracle. I believe this miracle shows He is the sufficient source of all provisions for our service in the Kingdom of God.

*On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. [They were returning from a preaching and healing tour and go aside for some rest, encouragement and a debriefing from Jesus.] 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.*

Isn’t that something? Here we have a great illustration of what Christian service means and involves. Jesus doesn’t say to the crowds, “Come on, can’t I have a little peace and quiet? Come back some other day.” Instead, He welcomes them, ministers to them and heals them. One thing we can learn

about Christian service from this passage is it is about people. People are not an inconvenience; rather they are the focus of service.

Last Sunday, a man came in to New Covenant during the worship service and wanted to talk to a staff member. Dave DeHaan left the service and talked with him. People might even interrupt our worship but if our service is about people, we will stop what we are doing and care for them. Do you look at people as inconveniences or interruptions or do you realize they are the focus of service? Whatever the cost, we take the time to minister to people.

*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."*

It has been a long day. The people and disciples need to eat and rest. So the disciples come up with the idea of having Jesus send the crowd away. Notice His response in 9:13-14:

*But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." ['You' is the emphasis of this verse. After all, Jesus had given the disciples authority to preach and heal. Notice their response.] They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people." For there were about five thousand men. [5,000 to 10,000 people; maybe more.]*

That's a good size crowd to feed and not the type of crowd we would have over for lunch. My wife might get upset if I invited 5,000 to 10,000 people for lunch, or I might get upset—as cheap as I am. All these people need something to eat and Jesus says, "You take care of them." They respond, "We can't do it. We don't have the food or the money."

This miracle appears in all four Gospels. I believe this is significant because God wants us to pay attention to this important event. John 6:1-15 tells of how the disciples came to Jesus and said they only had five loaves and two fish and they could not raise the amount needed to feed all the people, as it would take a long time to earn that kind of money.

What do you expect in this passage? The first time I read it, I expected Jesus to say, "Come on, men! How many times do I have to tell and show you what ministry is about and how to do it? What is wrong with you? Don't you have any faith at all?" Yet look at Jesus' response in the end of Luke 9:14 through verse 17:

*And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." And they did so, and had them all sit down. 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. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.*

We don't see a rebuke from Jesus. You would think He would rebuke the disciples for He had just given them authority and sent them out. Yet they gave Him the right answer: "We can't do it." This is emphasized in John 6:5-6: "*Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?'* [John adds this note] *He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.*" Jesus knew He was going to perform a miracle to feed all these people and it didn't make any difference what the disciples or people did or did not do. This miracle is not about the disciples and their inadequacy, although that interpretation is given in a number of commentaries. Rather, John says the disciples got it right. Jesus implies this as well because He did not rebuke them for their lack of faith. It is important that we see this. The disciples say, "We can't do it." Jesus tells them, "You got it right. Tell the crowd to sit down and I'll take care of it."

Notice how Jesus takes care of the situation. "*And they all ate and were satisfied*" (Luke 9:17). The skeptics look at this passage of Scripture and say, "It was probably like a communion service with appetizer-size portions, just enough to get by." However, the text says "*...they all ate and were satisfied.*" Have you ever pushed back from the table and said, "Man, that was good. I'm stuffed and can't eat any more." That is the picture I get when I look at this passage. The people were full and couldn't eat anything else because Jesus provided a great meal for them. So here we see the real new math: five plus two plus Jesus equals leftovers—all you want and more. This text is about Jesus and what He can do.

The skeptics say, "Who goes out on an all-day excursion and doesn't take food with them? The real miracle is that the people had the food hidden because they didn't want to share; but when they saw Jesus talking with the disciples and heard what He said, they brought out all their food and shared. It was really a miracle of their hearts, not of Jesus." Yet the text says Jesus did the work. We don't know how He did it. The disciples kept passing the food out and it kept increasing until they had much more than was needed.

## **The Practical Application**

We need to see that Jesus is the point of this passage. We see this particularly in John 6:25-59 where Jesus explains what is happening. After this miracle, the people still follow Him. Notice what He says to them: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves*" (John 6:26). He gets right to the matter of how the people are searching for Him for all the wrong reasons. They just want their physical needs supplied when they need to concentrate on their deeper, spiritual needs. Notice what He says, "*Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal*" (verse 27). In other words, "Don't work to only have your physical needs met but also have

your spiritual needs met. I am the only One Who can do that because I come from the Father. I'm God in the flesh and can do that."

They respond, "*What must we do, to be doing the works of God?*" (verse 28). Isn't that just like us? We often respond, "Show me what I have to do and I'll do whatever You require. I'll follow the nine, ten or 24 steps; just give them to me. I would prefer three or four easy steps but want to know what I have to do." Notice Jesus' response: "*Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent'*" (verse 29). This takes us back to the section of Luke where we are asked if we believe Jesus is the One Who can satisfy the needs of our hearts and souls. Do we really believe that? We have to trust and believe Him.

Then we get to the heart of the matter: "*Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world'*" (John 6:32-33). He then goes on to say, "*I am the bread of life'*" (verse 35).

In Biblical times, bread was very significant and symbolic. To 'break bread' meant to have a meal. It symbolized all of life, for if you had bread you had enough to survive and sustain life. Jesus was driving a very important point home when He said, "*I am the bread of life.'*" He was saying, "I'm the One Who satisfies, nurtures, sustains life and strengthens you. Do you believe you need Me?"

Do we believe this for our service in the Kingdom of God? I believe that when you look at the feeding of the 5,000, you have a parable for Christian service. If we are going to serve Christ in the Kingdom of God—through the church, our work, wherever we are and in whatever capacity—there are four steps we need to take beyond trusting Him as Savior and Lord.

## **Four Steps to Service**

1. We need to say with the disciples, "I can't do whatever God is calling me to in my own strength. In and of myself—my intellect, studies, degrees, abilities, things I like to do or enjoy doing—I can't do it." Have we realized that? Are we serving God in our own strength? Maybe that is why we are having difficulties and problems because we're looking to do it on our own. We need to say, "The task is too big for me." Whatever God calls us to do—preaching, teaching, serving Him in our work—we need to take the first step of realizing we cannot do it in our own strength.
2. We need to bring our desire to serve, abilities, training and understanding to Jesus. Is our service merely rote? We may have been teaching a Sunday-school class for 20 years, have all the programs written out and be able to teach in a cycle of several years. We may think we have it all figured out and can answer all the questions.
3. We need to ask Jesus to bless our work. Do we really bring the Sunday School class to Jesus and ask Him to bless it? Do we bring our care group to Jesus and say, "God, we have people

- from diverse backgrounds, viewpoints and needs. I give them to You. Help me direct and encourage them.”
4. Trust Jesus to work. Do we think we have to constantly tweak things or always do things ourselves? Do we trust the Word of God to work? The Spirit of God will take the Word of God and work in people’s lives. We don’t have to browbeat others with the Word but simply present it and trust Jesus to take the Word, multiply it in them and do His work. It was so liberating to me when this idea dawned on me after many years of Christian service. I don’t need to know apologetics to defend everything or have the answers to everyone’s questions. I can give them the Word and trust God to meet them.

This past week, I received a book about Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s life and ministry. As I thumbed through it, I was amazed at his ability to choose just the right words. I became interested in the opinion of the authors of this biography and was struck by how some of the things they said about Bonhoeffer were applicable for this sermon. It shows that this text in Luke is really about Christian service and Christ being our sufficiency and provision.

There are three results that come from using the grid of our four steps to service.

1. We realize that service in the Kingdom of God requires a stance of humility. If you want to go anywhere and have ministry and service in the Kingdom of God, you have to start low. Scripture is filled with passages that show how God will lift us up in due time if we humble ourselves before Him. But we have to start with a humble view of ourselves.
2. We serve through Christ and are dependent on Him. It is not about us—what we do or fail to do. We do have responsibilities to fulfill but ultimately the provision is in, through, because of and for Christ. Everything is from Him, through Him, to Him and for Him. Do we realize that when we serve Him? Are we walking in dependence on Him?
3. We become dependent on God’s grace in order to serve. In the front of my Bible is a prayer written by Martin Luther in 1542. He said, “Lord, you have placed me in Your church as overseer and pastor. You see how unfit I am to administer this great and difficult office. Had I previously been without help from You, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon You. I gladly offer my mouth and heart to Your service. I would teach the people and I would continue to learn. To this end I shall meditate diligently on Your Word. Use me, dear Lord, as Your instrument. Only do not forsake me, for if I were to continue alone, I would quickly ruin everything.”

If you wonder why Martin Luther was used like he was, look at his humility and dependence on God. That is an example for us of how to serve. We want to be used by God as His instruments. By ourselves we will mess up everything, so we are dependent upon Christ. Our confidence must be in Christ.

In conclusion, I want to draw us to two verses that summarize the purpose of all the text we have looked at concerning this miracle in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. One of them

is a negative statement because it talks about something we don't, can't or shouldn't do; the other is positive.

John 15:5 can be seen as a summary statement of all these verses. Jesus says, "*I am the vine; you are the branches.* [He is talking to His disciples. If you are a follower of Christ, you are a disciple of Christ and He is calling you the branches.] *Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*" We like to read this and say, "I can do okay—cobble things together and make it work." Jesus said, "No, apart from Me you are going to lay a big, fat goose egg and not accomplish anything." Do we really believe that when it comes to the service and work in which we are engaged? Do we trust in Christ or think it is all up to us? Are we control-freaks or do we trust Christ to work, yield to Him and let Him work in and through us.

Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Paul gives us a positive spin on this. He says, "*I can do all things through him [through Christ] who strengthens me*" (Philippians 4:13). Whatever the task, I can do it. Is it because of my mental capacity, stamina or patience? No. I can do it because Christ is working in and through me and He is sufficient. Do we agree with Paul and Christ? Are we approaching our service in the Kingdom of God in that way? If we are, God will bless and use us. If we are not, we're going to fail in the end and not do all we think we are going to do. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. But with Him, in Him and through Him we can do all things.

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