

Humility & Some Leftover Bread

You Asked For It, Part 7

Luke 9:12-17

I would imagine that all of us would agree with the fact that humility is that one attribute in life that whenever you think you have it, you've automatically lost it.

Let me test that theory . . . on the count of three, I want you to raise your hand if you think you're humble . . . 1, 2, 3.

Well, if you lose it whenever you think you have it, how do you know if you are?

How do you know if you're developing the attribute of humility?

The founding president of the Navigator's organization constantly emphasized having a servant's attitude of humility. On one occasion a businessman asked Lorne, how can you know when you have a servant's attitude? He responded, "By how you act when you're treated like one."ⁱ

Dr. H. A. Ironside pastored the famous Moody Church in Chicago during the early 1900's. As a younger man, he wasn't developing that sense of humility as much as he thought he should be and so he asked an older Christian mentor what he should do about it. The mentor told him that the way to develop humility was to do something really humbling – like wear a sandwich board with the plan of salvation in Scripture on the front and back – and then walk through the shopping district downtown Chicago for an entire day.

Ironside followed his friend's advice and when he returned to his apartment after a humbling day of ridicule and laughter and even obscenities, he was exhausted. But as he took off the sandwich board, he found himself thinking, "You know, there's probably nobody else in Chicago who would have done that!"

That exercise in humility only increased his pride.

Andrew Murray touches on the solution as he writes, "The humble person is not one who thinks poorly of himself; a humble person is someone who does not think of himself at all."ⁱⁱ

I'm about to take you to *Luke chapter 9*, just after the disciples have returned from their first tour of preaching and miraculous healing – as they

demonstrated with apostolic power the authenticity of their gospel message.

It was a whirlwind of activity and they were really excited with the amazing miracles and the rapt attention of the audiences – they naturally began to struggle with their growing celebrity status among the people.

In fact, after another tour of ministry, the disciples returned to Jesus effectively saying, "Lord, is this great or what – You won't believe how the demons respond to our authority and the miracles that occur through our hands."

And Jesus effectively responded with, "***Look, if you really want something truly amazing to be excited about, just thank God your names are written in the Book of Heaven***" (*Luke 10:20*).

Pride is knocking on the door whenever you are more excited about what God does through you than what God has done for you.

Because the focus has shifted from the glory of God to ourselves.

One author warned about this, with humor, when they put it this way, "When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of that young donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments on the road, and singing praises, do you think that for one moment it ever entered the head of that donkey that any of that praise was for him?"ⁱⁱⁱ

The disciples are about to be taught, among other things, a valuable lesson in humility.

Now the only miracle, besides the resurrection of Jesus Christ that is recorded in all four Gospel accounts is the feeding of the 15,000.

We most often think of the feeding of the 5,000 – as it's outlined by the editing team of my English translation; but as we'll see, there were 5,000 men; the Gospel of Matthew informs us women and children were fed by the trainload as well.

In fact, it is more likely the feeding of the 15,000 . . . and people to this day have never quite gotten over it.

Let me set the context of this miracle a little further.

The Inconvenience of Service

The disciples are worn out. The press of the people and the demands on their time have taken a toll.

Mark's Gospel informs us that Jesus was taking His disciples to *a secluded place for rest (Mark 6:31)*.

Jesus suggests that paddle around the lake to a spot about 8 miles away where they can get some rest, but the crowd literally chases them down.

Maybe you've discovered the pressing nature of ministry as well.

Your desire for a quiet, secluded place never does become reality.

You're volunteering to help, to teach, to lead, to prepare, to fix, to disciple, to preach, to counsel and sooner or later you discover the truth, as Chuck Swindoll put it, that *your ministry never sleeps.*^{iv}

In your personal lives . . . in and through the life of the church – there is always more to do than we have time to do, right?

Kent Hughes, a pastor for many years, commented on this text by quoting that funny, but true, little poem that goes like this:

*Mary had a little lamb
Twas given her to keep,
But then it joined the local church
And died for lack of sleep.*^v

The truth is, serving Christ, in whatever way you do it, is rarely scheduled in nice, neat convenient blocks of time.

So, right off the bat, one of the lessons that they continue learning is the inconvenience of serving Christ.

But to the bigger issue, the Lord is about to show them their utter inadequacy in serving Him.

Their Inadequacy in Service

If you combine the four Gospels, you'll discover that around 4:00 pm on this mid-April day, which is when this event took place – Jesus asks the disciples a question.

John's Gospel records the astounding question – Jesus says to His disciples, *“Where can we go to buy enough bread so that this crowd can be fed?” (John 6:5)*.

John also informs us that Jesus asked this question *to test them*.

To test them how? Was He testing their level of faith in His ability? Well then they failed the test because they will never even think about the fact that Jesus would perform a miracle on that kind of scale.

Was He testing their sense of management skills? Evidently Phillip thought so.

John's Gospel informs us that at this point, Jesus asked Phillip specifically *where they could but the food*.

Why ask Phillip? Why single him out? Because this was Phillip's hometown. He knew where the bakery was; he knew where the market was located. He knew the price of bread in this region.

And, I love this, Phillip thinks the Lord is serious – so he gets out his pencil and his calculator and starts figuring away at the cost of this meal and finally announces, “Okay, Lord, I got it . . . 15,000 people times the cost of a loaf of bread, divided by 10 little bites per person, per loaf will cost us 200 denarii. (*John 6:7*) – and then he adds, but only if everybody takes a little bite.

This past week I was in Dunbar Wisconsin at a Christian college speaking – and several guys who were interested in ministry and possibly coming to Shepherds seminary wanted to take me to supper and grill me.

The only restaurant within miles was a little hole in the wall named “Mary's Place” . . . we got there, and of course, I was buying, but on the front door there was a placard that said, “No checks or credit cards – cash only.”

I only carry my debit card and a credit card for traveling . . . I never carry cash anyway – I don't even know what cash looks like anymore.

We stood outside trying to figure out what to do. One of the students said, “Well, I've got some cash on me.” It wasn't much between the four of us, but we decided to go in and figure it out.

So we went in, sat down – and all of us ordered water to drink, of course; we ended up figuring out that we could each get a hamburger and split some fries and have enough money. It was an outstanding hamburger – and I got two french-fries. No I got more than that.

Then, when the bill came, this student realized he was actually going to have a little money left over, so we all split a couple of milkshakes and had just enough left over for a decent tip.

It reminded me of the old days . . . where you'd look for change under your car seat; I remember

Marsha and I, when I was in seminary, having just enough change for me to go downstairs to the vending machine and we'd split a Doctor Pepper. You counted every penny . . . maybe you're there right now – counting entirely on the Lord for whatever comes next.

These disciples didn't have much money between them . . . but Phillip is still figuring it down to the penny – it'll take **200 denarii to feed this crowd** – and Phillip knows the baker won't take credit – they'll need cash.

You need to understand that **200 denarii** was almost a year's salary for the working class in Christ's day.

So to compare that salary to our minimum wage context today, it would have taken the disciples around \$13,000 to buy dinner – and everybody would still have to share.

And His intention is clear – Jesus tells them in **verse 13 to feed them**. Don't disperse the crowd of 15,000 people, feed them.

You give them something to eat!

And I think the implication within the context of what's happening here is the Lord suggesting – **You** guys have the miracle stories . . . *You* guys have power over demons . . . **you** guys are back from another successful tour of ministry . . . **you're** all caught up in the amazing things you've done . . . so **you** go ahead and feed them.

They're stunned.

And they're stumbling all over themselves . . . how in the world are we ever going to pull this off?

And they are so overwhelmed with the task – they are so focused on this huge, hungry crowd, that they completely overlook Jesus.

They don't even think about His provision in the face of their poverty.

Jesus Christ is going to teach them a lesson in humility which is the foundation for Spirit-empowered ministry.

- He's going to teach them that they have nothing to offer people, apart from Him.
- That their hands are useless, unless His hands are involved.
- We have no power apart from His provision
- But He's also going to teach them that their poverty is the perfect context for His provision.
- He's going to teach them, and us, that we are nothing more than conduits of God's grace.

Alexander McLaren, the Scottish pastor and author 2 centuries ago wrote, "It is often our God-given duty to attempt something of which we are totally inadequate – in the understanding that God has laid the task on us to drive us to Himself, and there to find sufficiency."^{vi}

Now the glory and grace of Jesus is that He will use whatever we surrender to Him – no matter how little or how small.

The disciples scrounge around and discover a little boy's lunch.

The most famous brown bag in history. Notice **verse 13 of Luke 9**. **And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish . . ."**

Another Gospel writer gives us the details that Andrew was the disciple that founds the boy's lunch, but when he handed it to the Lord.

Another Gospel account informs us that Andrew apologetically comments, "**But what are these among so many.**" (**John 6:9**) In other words, "Silly me, for even handing this bag lunch to you, Lord . . . what am I thinking?"

The other disciples are probably thinking, "Way to go Andrew – that was brilliant. Why don't you give the kid his lunch back?"

But by now it's in the Master's hands.

Two fish and five barley loaves; barley bread was the common bread of the masses; it was coarse and dark . . . inferior in its texture and taste to wheat bread.

Barley was often fed to the livestock. So this clues us in on the poverty level of this young boy. These would have been 5 small, flat, palm sized pieces of barley bread.

Another Gospel writer specifically identifies these two fish with the Greek word, **opsaria** – which was a small fish the size of a minnow or sardine.

They dried these fish and salted them down and added spices and relish – they pickled these fish for flavor.

This young boy has his lunch of pickled fish to help his dry barley bread go down.

Notice **verse 14 of Luke 9**. **And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each."**

Why seat them? For starters, once people saw what was happening, they might have rushed forward to get some food, crushing each other in the process.

But I think more than that, sitting them down also allowed them to see what He was doing.

And they'll get it, by the way. *John's Gospel* tells us that after this miracle they will try and crown Him King.

The Rabbis of Jesus' day were teaching that when the Messiah came, He would reproduce the miracle of the manna in the wilderness – delivering manna from heaven.

And Jesus will actually fulfill that teaching – feeding the people in the wilderness with bread – and more.

It is not a coincidence that the very next thing He will preach, in *John 6*, is that He Himself is the Bread of Life.

He not only delivers manna from Heaven, He is the eternal manna from heaven.^{vii}

Now notice *verse 16*. ***Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them*** – in other words, He more than likely prayed the traditional blessing, preserved in the Mishnah – the ancient record of Jewish practices – the prayer went like this, “Blessed by you, O Lord our God, king of the world, who causes bread to come forth from the earth.”

And at that moment, you would have heard a thunderous 15,000 voice “Amen”.^{viii}

Now notice, further in *verse 16*, after blessing it, ***Jesus kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people.***

Jesus is standing their alternating between breaking the bread apart and these two fish apart.

Luke uses the imperfect tense here to say that the miracle occurred in His hands – ***He kept on breaking them and giving them to His disciples.***^{ix}

Perhaps they used their outer tunics to hold all the bread and fish and they walked down each row for them to reach out and take, and then they ran back to the Lord and got loaded up again.

As you might expect, those who deny the miraculous power of Christ, try to explain this away.

They suggest that Jesus is passing out communion – since He blessed it and broke it – this is obviously a forecast of the coming ordinance of communion.

So everybody really only got a crumb of bread and a little microscopic taste of fish.

Never mind the missing ingredient of fresh wine for them to drink – representing His blood.

John's Gospel shreds that liberal viewpoint by telling us that the people got as much bread and fish as they wanted.

Both Matthew and *Luke* tell us that they were all *satisfied* – notice *verse 17* – ***And they all ate and were satisfied.***

That word for satisfied is from chortazo (χορτάζω) which means, filled up.^x

In fact, it was the Greek word normally used to describe the fattening of animals who gorged themselves until they could eat no more.^{xi}

That's what you do at Golden Corral.

These people were literally stuffed with bread and pickled fish.

Another unbelieving viewpoint that discounts this miracle is the suggestion that what really happened was the people were so embarrassed by this little boy offering his lunch, that they all took out their lunches and shared them with each other.

Again, Luke records, carefully, I might add, in *verse 17*. ***And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.***

The baskets of leftovers were from the hands of Jesus.

And there's one basket, by the way, for each disciple – which would allow them to eat once they've finished serving everybody else. And they no doubt learned unforgettable lessons on availability and trust and humility as they ate this leftover bread and fish.

But back to this miracle – don't miss it . . . Jesus Christ here is literally creating bread.

He's leaping over the process of sewing and weeding and watering and reaping and winnowing and crushing and mixing and baking . . . no – bread!

He's creating real fish in His hands – and the implication is that He's even creating the spices and the relish that pickled them.

He is the Lord of creation. This is the demonstration of what the Apostle Paul would write in *Colossians 1* – ***For by Him all things were created . . .***

This is Creator God, bringing basket loads of pickled fish and barley bread into existence.

No wonder the crowd wanted to immediately crown Him King.

It's not time for that now . . . but this is a prelude to His divine power to provide in the coming kingdom and then throughout eternity.

But in the meantime and here's the punch line to the lesson.

The disciples always found His hands were full whenever they came back to Him with hands that were empty.

That exercise develops humility – recognizing that our hands are so easily and quickly emptied – but that His hands are always full.^{xii}

And He fills our hands . . . and we give it away . . . trusting that there will be enough left over for His servants to eat as well along the way.

That’s why Paul gets to the end of his life and says, “God forbid that I should glory in anything other than the work of Christ on the cross.”

When Peter gets to the end of his life, he doesn’t list in his letters all the stuff he did – “Hey, I was the guy who walked on water . . . and healed a bunch of

people, preached the opening sermon in church history and did a lot of other miraculous things; instead, he wrote this to the believers at large, “***And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. . .***” (*I Peter 5:5*)

The lesson to learn – which develops humility along the way – is to serve Him with empty, yet upturned hands . . . ready to receive what only He can do – whatever He creates, from His overabounding, never ending supply.^{xiii}

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/7/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i Michael P. Green, 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching (Baker 1989), p. 200

ii Ibid

iii Ibid, p. 199

iv Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on John (Zondervan, 2010), p. 226

v R. Kent Hughes, Luke: Volume 1 (Crossway, 1998), p. 330

vi Hughes, p. 332

vii Hughes, p. 332

viii Hughes, p. 333

ix Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 165

x Rienecker/Rogers, p. 165

xi John MacArthur, Luke 6-10 (Moody Publishers, 2011), p. 255

xii McLaren quoted in Hughes, p. 333

xiii Adapted from Swindoll, p. 227