

Sermon Series: If Jesus Came To Dinner

#8 A Greater Banquet – Luke 9:1-20

“How could 5 loaves and 2 fish ever feed 5000 people?” That’s a fair question!

I watched *Masterchef* last week, and those contestant cooks **struggled to feed even 120** people in one sitting!



In the passage we heard from Luke chapter 9:1-20, Jesus performs a great miracle to **feed more than 5000 people¹** in a deserted place from just one basket.

“How could 5 loaves and 2 fish ever feed 5000 people?” This was exactly the question Jesus’ **doubting disciples** asked Jesus. You can see this in verse 13 of Luke chapter 9...



“But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish,” ... “... are you expecting us to go and buy enough food for this whole crowd?”

It had been a **long day**. Jesus and his disciples had retreated far from the towns² where they had been preaching good news, and praying for healing for the sick in a recent campaign.³ A **huge, hungry crowd** that sought them out, now needed feeding, and Jesus rather unhelpfully said to his apprentices: “**You feed them**”... They retorted, “How *can* we?!”

It’s a fair question! Even in our drive-through, **Uber-eats** world one can’t imagine **how** so many could be served from so little.



¹ Matt. 14:21 records that this figure was in addition to women and children of no specified number

² Vss. 6, 10 - The direction mentioned, towards Bethsaida, is a town whose name means hunting/fishing area

³ Vss. 1-6 – What a privilege for Galileans. Jesus’ ministry would now move to the coastal cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Caesarea Philippi, and then to the Transjordan, and finally down through Judea to Jerusalem where he would be crucified.

The Feeding of the 5000 is one of **only two miracles** that are **recorded** in **all four Gospels** (the other is the resurrection of Jesus!).⁴



- Modern Liberal scholars try to **explain away** history's **most famous picnic** (hoarding of fish and flour perhaps!)
- Opponents of Christianity simply claim the text is **fake news**.

Yet, readers of the Bible with eyes and ears of faith still today ponder the possibility that God could produce such a miracle to declare the true identity of Jesus. It's also important to recognise, that as was the case with the resurrection of Jesus, **eyewitnesses** to **this** event were still alive at time of the writing of the Gospel.

Irrespective of these matters, Luke, the Gospel writer, wants his readers to focus on a **different question** raised in this passage – **Who is this Jesus?**

The important question

This question appears directly and indirectly **9 times** in the passage⁵ - **Who is this Jesus?**

Look with me in verses in verses 7 – 9, and verse 19...

- **Herod** the Tetrach, who liked to be called King Herod,⁶ asks this very question in verse 9: “**who** is this man about whom I hear such stories?”
Herod asked this question because he was **threatened** by Jesus' influence, just as he was by John the Baptizer.

⁴ (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15) The feeding the five thousand is mentioned 9 times in all the Gospels. It is also referred to on 5 other occasions (Matthew 16:9; Mark 6:52; 8:19; John 6:23; 6:26).

⁵ Verses 7, 8, 9, 18, 19, 20

⁶ Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great by his Samaritan wife Malthace, was tetrarch (head of a quarter) of Galilee and Peraea during the whole period of our Lord's life on earth (Luke 23:7). He was a frivolous and vain prince, and was chargeable with many infamous crimes (Mark 8:15 ; Luke 3:19 ; Luke 13:31 Luke 13:32). He beheaded John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12) at the instigation of Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Herod-Philip, whom he had married. Pilate sent Christ to him when he was at Jerusalem at the Passover (Luke 23:7). He asked some idle questions of him, and after causing him to be mocked, sent him back again to Pilate. The wife of Chuza, his house-steward, was one of our Lord's disciples (Luke 8:3).

- **The crowds** ask this question (Who is this Jesus?) in verses 7 and 8, and you see it again in verse 19. They are **speculating**, guessing who Jesus' true identity must be. **The crowd** asks because they are **hungry** and **hopeful** – rumours of God at work gave them hope for **healing, peace**, even **freedom**.
 - Some **supposed** that **John the Baptizer** had come back to life, the neo-prophet Herod recently had murdered (Mk. 6:14-29; Matt. 14:1-12).
 - Others **hoped** that a great prophet of old like **Elijah** or **Moses** might have returned in the person of Jesus to usher in God's promised new age of peace.

To modern ears the **expectation of Elijah** returning seems **random**. But you may know that the Old Testament leaves the life-story of **Elijah a bit open-ended** in 2 Kings 2:1-12.⁷ Many 1st Century Jewish people, and even some today, hope the prophet will return to **prepare the way** for God's chosen one, the **Messiah** or **Christ** (Mal. 4:5-6; Mark 9:11-13).⁸

Moses too had promised that one day in the distant future **one like him** would arise (Deut. 18:17-19).

Imagine after the great picnic, walking home and thinking of Old Testament stories of **Moses** and the **daily "manna"** provided miraculously in the wilderness (Exod. 16). Some may have remembered **Elisha** the prophet who fed many with just a little, but after there was **much food left over** (2 Kings 4:42-44).

All the way home they would be chatting, **"Who is this Jesus?"**

Neither Herod, nor the crowds, received a satisfying answer in direct words that day. Instead, Jesus had shown them his true identity in the very **act of this miracle** with hands that **kept on giving** to the needy.

We read verses 14 and following...

⁷ Elisha, the successor to Elijah, performed a miracle resembling the Feeding of the 5000 as in 2 Kings 4:42-44.

⁸ Jesus identified John the Baptizer as the fulfiller of that Elijah role (Matt. 11:14).

Jesus replied, “Tell them to sit down in groups of about fifty each.”
15 So the people all sat down. 16 Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them.

Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he kept giving the bread and fish to the disciples so they could distribute it to the people. 17 They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers!

A Glimpse of a Greater Banquet

Luke 9 shares some of the same themes we’ve been studying in this series –

- In vs 11 we see how Jesus **welcomed** all in the crowds to join in (the disciples would have turned them away, but not Jesus).
- In vs 15 he **asked the crowd to recline** (our English translations say “sit”). Reclining in groups of 50 resembles a **banquet not picnic** – here too is a **foretaste** of the greater feast promised by the prophets of old.
- In vss. 16, 17, Jesus’ hands **keep on giving** (as the Greek word tells us). God give in **great abundance** to those at His table, and there’s **plenty more** to go around **for others who join in**.

What about Captain Tom Moore this past week in the UK. What an example of surprising abundance! The 99-year-old war veteran pledged to walk 100 laps around his property to raise 1000 pounds for the NHS before his 100th Birthday. On last count he had raised 30 million Australian dollars.



In the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus it’s the **astounding abundance** of God’s hospitality and grace that surprises and delights us. It’s **Good News for everyone**.

Jesus supersedes all three great heroes of the past he was thought to be (J the B, Elijah and Moses).

In a few verses more, 3 disciples would see a vision of **Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus** at his transfiguration (Luke 9:30). Could Jesus be the hope of a **greater Exodus, they would ask?**

The **prophecy of the greater banquet** suggested in Jesus' Feeding of the 5000 is found in The Book of Isaiah some 800 years before Jesus' death for sins. Isaiah 25:6-9 tells us...

On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all people, a banquet of aged wine the best of meats and the finest of wines.

On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all the nations; he will **swallow up death forever**. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from the earth.

The feeding of the 5000 a foretaste of this **greater banquet**. Notice in Isaiah's vision:

- **no one need leave** this greater feast,
- **death** itself is on the menu – it will be swallowed up by God! It's a foretelling the cross of Christ, who is the host of the banquet, and,
- tears will make way for **joy**.

I was asked a few years back to bless a banquet at the opening of a winery in regional Victoria. I could speak of all the fine feasting from a spread of great abundance for a huge gathering that day. But it was **the speech by the curator of the vines** that I remember most. In his speech he **gave thanks** for the earth that produces such an **abundance of fine wine** from just a few **tiny grapes**.



Isaiah gives us a **speech** fit for the **host** of the **great messianic banquet** yet to come. In Isaiah chapter 55 (verses 1-2):

“Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink— even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk— it's all free! Why spend

your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen to me, and you will eat what is good. You will enjoy the finest food.”

An answer to the key question

If the reader of Luke 9 missed the answer to the key question, Luke ensures it is not lost. In verses 18-20, he records a scene set after the crowds have dispersed...

Only his disciples were with him, and he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” 19 “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other ancient prophets risen from the dead.” 20 Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?” Peter replied, “You are the Messiah (or **Christ**) sent from God!”

Our responses to the miracle

Here are some thoughts to consider today...

1. **Are you wondering who** this Jesus is? As you’ve been listening, had you previously thought Jesus a good person, a good teacher maybe? A messenger or healer? Jesus is God who came to us and took on human life to bless us and restore us to God and welcome us God’s banqueting table (We are here to help you find out more)
2. Are you a Christian, **wondering how to serve** others as Jesus would want you to? The disciples learned to **receive hospitality** and to **depend on God’s** provision in their mission trip around Galilee (see verses 3-5). But at the feeding of the 5000 they **had to learn to extend the hospitality of God** to others with what God gives them. Jesus was readying his disciples for his departure.

Until the greater banquet comes, the Church should seek to serve those who **hunger in real terms** in our world. Just last week we saw vision of **400 Rohingya refugees** rescued by Bangladesh coast guard who had been at sea for weeks, lost. They were **malnourished**, in tears and **without hope**.

It's vital that Christians should serve those most needy in our world, even with the little we may have. We are blessed to have the assistance of many good Christian agencies that we can support to do so, but we can look locally too to those we might share with. In-so-doing the Church will demonstrate God's great generosity in Jesus, God who welcomes all - especially the least and the lost - to share in the abundance of the greater banqueting table to come.

3. **Are you Wondering** if there's a **deeper satisfaction** for your spiritual hunger? Bishop J. C. Ryle wrote many years ago, "The heart of (mortals) can **never** be satisfied with the things of this world. The heart is always empty, and hungry, and thirsty, and dissatisfied, till it comes to **Christ**. It is ... they who hear Christ's voice, and follow him, and feed on him by faith, who are filled."

Of all the things that we need to remember and never forget, the most important is the provision of grace that **swallows up sin and death** and **gives new life** through trusting in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. AMEN.

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