

Mr. Self-Sufficiency Put to Death

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[There were two] announcements that [weren't] made. One is that it's time to submit questions for the Q&A sermons. We're going to be doing a couple of those in August. If you don't know about those, every year we collect questions from the congregation [and] I try to answer ones I've never answered before. Just [submit] questions about the Bible—don't ask me my opinion on things—but if you want to know something about the Bible, write it down, get it to the office, e-mail it, whatever, and Ruth will get those compiled and I'll try and answer as many of them as I can. [The second announcement] is [that] we have the Macks with us this morning—Wendy and Carol Mack. If you don't know the Macks, [they are] Beth Mack's—our beloved Beth Mack—parents, [whom] they stole from us. They are now ministering in South Africa along with Beth. You might want to see them after the service and ask them how things are going.

If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 9:12–17. C.H. Spurgeon, in a sermon entitled “Fear Not,” said;

When God's warrior marches forth to battle with plumed helmet, and with mail about his loins, strong in his own majesty, when he says, “I know that I shall conquer, my own right arm, and my mighty sword shall get me the victory,” defeat is not far distant. God will not go forth with that man who goes forth

in his own strength. He who reckons on victory, having first calculated his own might, has reckoned wrongly. “For it is not by might nor by power but by My Spirit,’ sayeth the Lord of Hosts.” They that go forth to fight, boasting that they can do it shall return with their banners trailing in the dust and with their armor stained with defeat, for God will not go forth with the man who goes forth in his own strength. God has said it. Men must serve Him. They must serve Him in His own way and they must serve Him in His own strength, too, or He will never accept their service.

Does that prick your conscience? That just runs me through. Heaven will only be able to reveal how many times in my life I have set off on my own, in my own strength, trusting in my own ingenuity, in my own resources, only to return with my “banner trailing in the dust.” What is amazing is [that] I know that when I do this I am like a man hauling a cart of manure before the throne of grace only to have it rejected after [having labored] to get it there. What is wrong with me when I know this and [yet] I keep doing it time and time again? Especially when everything I do could be for God’s glory and for my eternal reward? You would think that I would learn the lesson, but no. I may bring less manure to Christ than before, but I still bring it, and on a regular basis, too. It’s always rejected. It never brings God glory. It’s never accepted. Jesus said it: “Without me you can do nothing” [see John 15:5], that is, “nothing for My glory.”

What is my terrible disease? It is self-trust, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency. It is only those who die to self and trust in Christ that labor for the glory of God. All others are pulling carts of manure. It doesn’t matter how hard we labor pulling those carts, they’re always rejected. They’re *always* rejected. They will never bring God glory and they will never bring us eternal reward. We can get up in the morning, we can read our Bibles, and pray, and then dash off on our own—[leaving] Jesus slammed up in the pages of our Bible—to live the rest of the day on our own, trusting in ourselves. We

ask for no help because we don't think we need any. If we had a spiritual nametag, it would read, "Mr. Self-Sufficiency."

In our text this morning, the feeding of the 5,000 will teach us that Mr. Self-Sufficiency needs to be put to death. Our text is one of the many miracle accounts that Luke records in his gospel. What's interesting about this particular miracle is not just that it shows us that [Jesus] is the Son of God, which is obvious, but this particular miracle is designed to teach us and the disciples a lesson—a very important lesson.

Now, before we get into the text this morning, I want you to remember that Jesus has been wandering around with the disciples. He's been doing miracle after miracle after miracle, healing all manner of disease and sickness. He raised the dead [see John 12:17], He controlled schools of fish [see Luke 5:4–6], He calmed the sea [see Luke 8:24–25], He cast out demons [see Luke 8:27–33], He performed who knows how many more miracles that are not even recorded up until the point [of our text]. And the disciples have seen it all. He even gave the [them] miraculous powers to cast out demons and heal all manner of disease and sickness [see Luke 9:1]. They know beyond a shadow of a doubt, have all the evidence they could ever need, to be thoroughly convinced that Jesus wields the power of God Almighty. That is beyond dispute.

The feeding of the 5,000 is just one of the examples [of this truth]. This is such an important miracle that it is one of the few—the very few and rare—texts that actually appear in all four gospels, other than the passion and resurrection of Christ. This instance of the feeding of these thousands of people occurs so that we can learn this important lesson. All four of the gospel writers include it. If you've ever seen the Christian symbol of the fish and the loaves, this is where it comes from—the feeding of the 5,000. It's a defining miracle in the life of Jesus and it drives home such an important truth.

Of course, when we look to some churches, they tell us, "Oh, this miracle never took place. What happened was there was a little boy who came forward, offered his lunch, everybody was shamed, and just happened to be

carrying huge amounts of food and they all pulled out their secret stores, feasted, and had twelve baskets left over.” Now, that would be an incredible miracle, to believe that. But that’s not what happened.

We see similar miracles like this [in other parts of the Bible]. For instance, in 2 Kings 4:42–44, Elisha is given the firstfruits offering by a man, and he takes [it], and says, “Go, feed the people.” The problem is [that] the offering is kind of small, but the people are many—there are about 100 men.

His servant says, “How. . . . What? How am I going to feed all those people?”

[Elisha] says, “Just go do it,” and as the man hands [the food] out, it keeps multiplying, [the men] are all fed and there’s an abundance left over—very similar [to the feeding of the 5,000]. Not only that, but in Matthew 15:32–39, we read about Jesus feeding a crowd containing 4,000 men plus women and children. That’s not the parallel account [to our text] because the parallel account of our text is in Matthew 14.

You can’t just go attacking the miracles and not have the whole Bible collapse in on itself. The fact is, Jesus fed the 5,000 men plus women and children in [the Luke 9:12–17] text. The Bible is true, regardless of what mainline churches are saying today. You know, I think sometimes a lot of Christians who go to a church that teaches the Bible, and that says the Bible is true, and believes the whole thing is true, can kind of get into this bubble of Christianity where they don’t realize that most churches today spend most of their time telling you why the Bible is *not* true, which is very strange since the very purpose of preaching is to proclaim the *truth* of the Bible, not the error.

And so, as we come to Luke 9:12–17, we are going to see this great miracle and we are going to see the lesson that the disciples learned in this miracle. It is the very same lesson that God wants you and I to learn. So follow along as I read Luke 9:12–17:

Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." 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 perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each." They did so, and had them all sit down. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.

Now, from this story of the feeding of the 5,000, I want to show you two ways you can put Mr. Self-Sufficiency to death. The first is: Don't forget the resource you have in Jesus.

Look at verse 12. It says, "Now the day was ending." Just stop there. This is a time reference. What day? [It is] the day that's mentioned in the preceding context. Remember, after Jesus had been teaching and doing miracles, [He and the disciples] decided to take a break in Bethsaida. Well, apparently, they didn't even get there. They were on their way to Bethsaida when the crowd seems to have overtaken them and Jesus then welcomes them, and begins to preach the kingdom of God, and to continue healing.

There is some disagreement about where Bethsaida is. Most believe it's in the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, near the Jordan River. Some say it's in the north[east] corner, some say there were two [Bethsaidas]. It doesn't really make a difference. What is clear is that, according to the end of [Luke 9:]12, they were "in a desolate place," not a city. What else is certain is that there was a huge crowd of people. Luke 9:14 says there were about 5,000 men. Now, the word "men" here is not the standard, and often

generic, term used for men and women in general—“anthropos,” the word we get “anthropology” from. But this is a more specific term, “aner,” which usually means “male” in distinction from women and children. Matthew 14:21, in the parallel account, makes this clear when Matthew says, “There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children.” So we’re talking about a huge group of people, maybe in excess of 15,000 people. That is a lot of people. If we were all crunched into this sanctuary—I mean, really get tight, fill up the entire balcony and every single pew all the way—and multiplied that times 15, now you’ve got the idea. That is a lot of people to feed—even with the In-N-Out truck. That’s a lot of people.

Look at the middle of [Luke 9:]12: “And the twelve came and said to Him, ‘Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place.’” Now, it’s pretty easy to figure out what is happening here. Jesus and His disciples are on the way to Bethsaida to take a break, the crowds overtake them, Jesus welcomes them, He begins to teach, and preach, and heal, and time is going by. People don’t want to leave—they’re fascinated. Jesus is just an incredible teacher. They want to get healed, and they *are* getting healed. They want to see other people getting healed. It’s a miracle show. It’s incredible teaching.

Yet, the day is starting to wax, and darkness is going to be coming upon them, and the disciples are looking out and they’re thinking to themselves, “Man, Jesus is so caught up in doing ministry here that pretty soon it’s going to be dark. Look at these men, and women, and children who don’t have anything to eat. We’re in the middle of nowhere.” So they decide to do Jesus a favor and give Him some advice: “Send them away so they can disperse and get out there and find some food and lodging.”

When you look at this, you can understand why they said that. I mean, it seems logical, it seems reasonable, it actually seems wise in some respects because what they’re doing is they’re looking ahead, they’re seeing the crowd, they’re realizing there’s a need. Darkness is coming, there are no provisions there, they’re in the middle of nowhere, and the nearest little

village isn't going to be able to absorb 15,000 people. So [the people] are going to have to do some hiking and get spread out because if they don't, they're going to go hungry. There are children there, and there are women—they need provisions.

It seems wise, and it seems prudent, right? Wrong. I'll show you why. They missed the critical factor: Jesus. They did not look to, consult in, or trust in Jesus. There they were with the greatest miracle worker who ever lived, God Almighty in human flesh, and not one of them went to Jesus, and said, "What do you think we should do?" or "What do you want us to do?" I mean, this is the guy who calmed the sea [see Luke 8:24–25], who raised the dead [see John 12:17], who restored sight to the blind man [see John 9:1–7], who turned water into wine [see John 2:1–11], who never needed advice from anyone, who always had the right answer, who was never wrong, who never overlooked anything. And here [the disciples] are, saying, "Hey, we've got an idea for you. Why don't you take our advice?" They looked to themselves, they trusted in themselves, they trusted in their own ideas, [and] they're [counseling] the Son of God. They were twelve Mr. Self-Sufficiencies.

Look at [Luke 9:]13: "But He," that is, Jesus, "said to them, 'You give them something to eat!'" Now, in the Greek, this is what is called an "emphatic statement," [that translates as] "you yourselves." Not only is it an emphatic statement, it is the strongest form of the Greek command there is: "I *command* you yourselves to give them something to eat." Now *that* is an interesting command. Why would Jesus say that? Think about it. I thought about that when I was studying. Why would Jesus tell the disciples, "You give them something to eat"? Jesus could see they didn't have enough food, [He] knew that they couldn't get enough food even if they went into the nearby town, [and] even if they had enough money they couldn't go there, get it, and bring it back to feed the people in time. What is He doing? Why does He tell them this? I think it's clear: Jesus wants them to come to the end of them, that's why—the end of self. To admit they couldn't do it—they didn't have the resources—to take care of these people.

This is made clear in the middle of [Luke 9:]13, where they say, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish.” Where did they look as soon as He gave them the command? Well, John 6:8–10 tell us that Andrew, Peter’s brother, thought of taking up a food collection. Jesus gives the command, and [Andrew] goes, “I’ve got an idea. Hey, does anybody have any food?”

He wanders around and [a] little boy [says], “I’ve got my lunch.”

“Give me that!” OK, that was Andrew’s idea: maybe [they] could donate the food and distribute it evenly. That’s what he was thinking, but he only came up with this boy’s lunch with five small barley loaves—think to yourselves of five little bran muffins—and two dried, emaciated perch about the size of your hand.

Look at the end of [Luke 9:]13–14. Luke adds that they said, “Unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people. (For there were about five thousand men.)” John tells us in John 6:7–9 that while Andrew was working on his food collection idea, Philip started to calculate how much it would cost to feed everybody. He’s the number cruncher. In John 6:7, Philip said this: “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.” Most likely, since we know from other texts that the disciples and Jesus had their own little personal treasury, [which] the people donated to, and they used to do ministry. Most likely, as soon as Jesus said, “You feed them,” Philip, the number cruncher, decides to figure it out. So he’s rifling through the treasury and they’ve got about 200 denarii, and he tells Jesus, “We only have enough to feed them a little. I mean, even if we wanted [to] and could find somebody to sell us that much bread, which is unlikely, we could only give them a little.”

Jesus’ command is working. It’s working because Jesus was not going to send the people away like [the disciples] suggested. [The disciples] didn’t have enough food among themselves to feed the crowd, the crowd couldn’t produce enough food to feed themselves—all they had was a boy’s lunch. [The disciples] didn’t have enough money to purchase food for the crowd, and even if they did have enough money, they would still have to get it, prepare it, and serve it to 15,000 people in the middle of nowhere, which

would be virtually impossible. So Jesus' command was impossible for them to fulfill. *On their own* it was impossible.

William Hendrickson, in his commentary on Luke, says, "The trouble with these disciples is that they concentrated all their attention on the vast, hungry crowd, forgetting about Jesus, His power, and love. This forgetfulness on their part was inexcusable." And I would add it's inexcusable for any Christian, at any time, for any task.

Look at your life. Do you trust Jesus or yourself? Do you look to Jesus constantly and consult with His Word continually? Do you trust in Jesus as you go to work, and ask Him for strength, and wisdom, and help, and blessing, or do you leave Him closed up in the pages of your Bible until the next morning? You know, when you do ministry, you need to ask Jesus' blessing. You need to ask for His help. You need to trust in Him by submitting to His Word. You can't launch off on your own, eyes fixed on self, thinking about what you're going to do in your own way, not consulting the Word of God. You have all the resources you need as a Christian to do everything God asks you to do, but you can't trust in your own resources, you have to trust in God's resources. You can't function by yourself as a Christian.

I know it is hard to be this way. I know in my own life it's hard to be this way. [It is] especially [hard] in America, where everybody pulls themselves up by their own bootstraps. You're the self-made woman. You do it your way. You're independent. Be your own island. That's good and fine if you want to end up in hell. If you want to spend an eternity suffering in the flames of the eternal lake of fire, fine, do it your way. But heaven is only populated by those who do things God's way, by God's Book, in the power of God's Spirit, for God's glory. That is all. There are no others.

Turn to Jeremiah 17. Jeremiah gives us what I like to think of as the two biographies of every man. Your biography is here. You probably didn't know that, but it is. Your name is by one of these two biographies. You have to find out which one it is. Biography number one: look at Jeremiah 17:5, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD."

Now, is that you? Is that your biography? Are you among those who are “cursed,” who “trust in mankind,” who trust in their own flesh, their own strength, who look to other people to solve all their needs? During the day, are you always thinking about how you can do it, how you’re going to make it happen, how you’re going to provide for yourself? When you do that, you turn away from the Lord. You cannot follow Christ and trust in self. They are in two different directions.

Now, if you’re out there and you’re thinking, “Well, I’m not sure if I’m *that* guy,” well, Jeremiah helps us be sure. Look at [Jeremiah 17:]6: “For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant.” [If] you’re not sure if you’re trusting in the Lord, then look at your soul, look at your spiritual life. What’s it like? [If it’s] desert-dry, you’ve lost your passion for Christ, you’ve lost your passion to share the gospel, you’ve lost your passion to read the Bible, your desire to pray. If that’s you, I don’t care how well you’re doing in the world’s eyes, you’re living in the “land of salt without inhabitant.” You are a bush in the hot, stony wasteland. Your heart is dry, and parched, and barren of spiritual juice.

The “wilderness” mentioned here is just another name for the desert regions. [Do] you know why deserts don’t produce life? [It’s because] they don’t have what? Water. But you know what? There is something that even if you had a plant and you planted it, if you put this one thing in there, it still wouldn’t be able to absorb water. [Do] you know what that one thing is? Salt. This bush is not only in the hot, stony, desert wilderness, but the soil is contaminated with salt. That is why it is barren and dry. This is the condition of the soul of the person who trusts in self. This is Mr., Mrs., Miss Self-Sufficiency. You trust in mankind, you make yourself your own god, you turn away from the Lord. You’re bringing a curse upon your own soul. You are voluntarily living in the stony wastelands without inhabitant.

[Do] you know what? You’re not going to see when prosperity comes because God doesn’t bless those kinds of people. Your spiritual life and

vitality will be dried up. When you think you know better than God and you set aside His Word to do what you think is better rather than what God says is better, you're turning away from the Lord, you're trusting in self. You trust in yourself when you will not stand up for the truth. You trust in yourself when you will not share the gospel. You trust in yourself when you will not read your Bible, when you will not pray, when you will not have the joy of the Lord, when you will not fellowship with His people, when you will not serve or do anything God tells you to do, or when you do things He tells you *not* to do. All of those are ways of not trusting in the Lord. Because in your mind you're really saying this: "Listen, Lord, I know that Your Word says this, but I don't trust that what You're saying is the best thing for me. So I am going to turn away from following You and do my own thing." This leads you to the spiritual desert.

Brothers and sisters, why suffer? Why pine away in misery? Why bring the curse upon yourselves? I'll tell you why: pride, self-trust, lust for the fleeting pleasures of sin, the desire to be your own god, to brazenly wear the nametag "Mr. Self-Sufficiency," I did it on my own. That's why. It's because you will not humble your heart and just do what Jesus says. You refuse to believe that without Christ you can do nothing.

We believe in a lot of things. I know you're going to leave here today, you'll climb in your car, you're going to take out the key, you're going to put it in the ignition, [and] you're going to turn it. Why? Because you believe your car is going to start when you do that. You're going to get home, you're going to turn on the faucet. Why are you going to turn the faucet on? Because you believe water is going to come out. But you won't believe Jesus. You won't trust in Jesus. [Do] you trust Jesus more than your car or not? [Do] you trust your faucet more than Jesus? Which one do you trust more? Your pride will not let you believe that you need Jesus continually, and that you must continually trust Him, and continually ask Him for help.

If that's you, you need to ask yourself, "What is the cure?" How can you flee from the spiritual desert and get into the land of prosperity? Well, Jeremiah tells us. Look at Jeremiah 17:7, [he] answers these very questions:

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD.” This is simple, isn’t it? [It’s] very simple. All you have to do is trust in the Lord and make the Lord your trust. Every day, every hour, every minute, you seek, trust, and rely on Jesus. That is the cure—simple, but hard to do. You must constantly be in fellowship with Christ all day long, praying to Him, asking for things, praising for things, looking for strength, looking for wisdom, looking for grace. I don’t care if you’re a junior higher, I don’t care if you’re a high schooler, or a college student, or a young housewife, or an empty nester, or a grandparent, you must trust in Jesus. You have to trust in the Lord—that is the key to spiritual prosperity.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking, because you tell me this after the service. “Pastor Jack, I know I need to trust the Lord. That is a no-brainer. My problem is [that] I don’t understand. When you say you need to trust the Lord, and it’s not by strength, and it’s not by might, and you can do nothing on your own, I still have to get up in the morning. I still have to eat breakfast. I still have to get in my car, and drive to work, and work all day, and come home, and take care of my family, and mow my lawn. I don’t understand. Is it me or is it Jesus? Do I just ‘let go and let God’ or what? How do I get to this place where I’m trusting in the Lord?”

Well, first, you have to make sure your sins are confessed. If you know you’re in rebellion against God, you’re never going to be trusting the Lord, because rebellion is antithetical to trusting. So if you know you have sin in your life, you must confess that because if you don’t confess it you’ll never be walking in the Spirit, and you’ll never give glory to God, because “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” [Romans 8:8]. It’s impossible to do so—[see] Romans 8:5–8.

Second, you need to trust in and use the various means of grace that God has given you. Do you know what I mean when I say, “means of grace”? What I’m saying is [that] a lot of times we think that grace is like a spiritual zap. You know, the spiritual concept—we’re saved by “grace,” whatever that is. It’s just a good thing. Even if you ask people, “What is grace?”

[They reply], “Well, it is those undeserved, unearned gifts God gives to unworthy sinners.” Bingo. So, what are the “means of grace”? For instance, prayer [is a “means of grace”]—God has given you the gracious provision of being able to boldly approach the throne of grace to find help in a time of need [see Hebrews 4:16]. Are you using the provision? Are you using the access card? Yes or no? God gives you His Word. [The Bible] is His Word—it gives you “everything pertaining to life and godliness” [2 Peter 1:3]. This is a gracious provision. Are you reading it? Are you studying it? Are you meditating on it? Are you hiding it in your heart? Yes or no? God gives you the fellowship of believers—other people with spiritual gifts and abilities who can encourage you, and strengthen you, and build you up in the Lord. Are you fellowshiping with the saints [see 2 Corinthians 8:4]?

That’s just three examples [of the means of grace]. God [also] gives teachers and pastors who can equip you in the Word. And today, like never before, you can go to churches that preach the Word and not only that, you can get books, and you can buy magazine articles, and you can buy tapes and CDs, and download MP3 files—they’re just everywhere. There are so many resources available so you can get good teaching [and] grow in the Lord. These are all the means of grace, things God gives you by His grace, which you have neither earned nor deserved.

But listen, you need to put them into practice. You go home, you’re going to brush your teeth. [You have a] toothbrush, toothpaste, [you] squirt [it on], [add some] water, [add] some action—your teeth are cleaned. All right? That’s a pretty simple task. Well, God gives you resources to clean up your life and [if] you use those resources, trusting in Him, you [will] change, you [will] grow. But I’m telling you, I could give you a case of toothpaste and fifty toothbrushes, but if you don’t grab the brush, squirt some gel on there, and get on it, your teeth are never going to be clean. Grace is not just permission to be passive—totally passive, “let go and let God,” just lay down and just hope you get sanctified and godly. It is a labor where you, trusting in God [and] asking God for help, grab hold of the means He has given you to live the life using them.

That is why there are so many verses—and we’ve looked at them before—where Paul says things like, “I labor more than them all, yet not I but the grace of God within me” [see 1 Corinthians 15:10]. Why? Because, yes he was laboring, but what was he using? The resources God supplied. So the question is: Are you doing that? When you don’t do that, you are trusting in self. When you do do that, you are trusting in God. Do you know what will happen when you learn to trust in the Lord? Look at Jeremiah 17:8:

For he will be like a tree planted by the water,
That extends its roots by a stream
And will not fear when the heat comes;
But its leaves will be green,
And it will not be anxious in a year of
drought
Nor cease to yield fruit.

That’s quite the contrast, isn’t it, between the bush in the desert [and the tree described here]? Here you have this tree, and it’s in good soil, it’s by a stream, its roots go down into the stream, and it just never lacks [water]. It’s got all the water it could possibly ever need, all the nutrients it could ever want. Even in a year of drought, even when the streambed goes dry, do you know where water can always be found? [It can be found] right under the surface of the streambed. That’s where the tree has its roots, [and] it never ceases to produce fruit. And so would the Christian who is trusting in the Lord, relying on the Lord, who has his roots deep into the various resources God has given us. [In] using those resources, [the Christian] will always produce fruit for God and give God glory. Everything you do, no matter how simple, or mundane, or seemingly insignificant, will be a holy, acceptable sacrifice to God, a spiritual service of worship [see Romans 12:1], if you’re trusting in God and walking in the Spirit—changing diapers, doing dishes, crunching numbers, mowing the lawn, anything. “Whether you eat, whether you drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” [see 1 Corinthians 10:31]. It’s not just about you sharing the gospel with somebody, it’s about your whole life being an offering to God, being a holy, acceptable sacrifice to God. Why? Because you’re trusting in Jesus.

So, you realize you're not trusting in Jesus, or you realize you're not trusting Him enough. How can you put Mr. Self-Sufficiency to death? How can you learn to seek Jesus first and rely upon Him continually? This is our second point: Marvel at what Jesus can do.

Look at [Luke 9:]14–15: “And He said to His disciples, ‘Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each.’ They did so, and had them all sit down.” Now just stop there for a moment. You can imagine how long it would take to organize 15,000 people. Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.”

[The disciples] go through their little shenanigans, they come back and say, “Well, we don't have it. We can't do it.”

Jesus says, “Have them all sit down in groups of fifty.”

And so, [the disciples] are wandering through the crowd, [and] they're probably thinking to themselves, “Why is He telling us to do this? Why doesn't He send them away? It's starting to get dark. He's acting like He's going to feed them, but He doesn't have any food. This is going to make us look like fools. You know, the people are going to get mad at us because if we have them all sit down like we're going to give them something and we don't give them something, then they're going to be angry with us.” They had no idea what was going to happen, and they *still* weren't looking to Jesus. They *still* weren't trusting in Him. They were probably a bit embarrassed going around, organizing everyone into groups, when they didn't have any food.

Mothers are there with babies crying, and teenagers are telling their parents, “Mom, I'm hungry.”

All these people probably keep asking the disciples, “Why are we sitting in groups of fifty?” And you know what? [The disciples] don't know.

[The disciples would probably say], “I don't know. It's what the Master said [to do] so that's what we're doing.” And with some exasperation and frustration, they probably responded [to the crowd], “You know, this is what Jesus wants to do so we're doing it.” This is [just] about the only good thing [the disciples] did. At least they were obeying. Sometimes God asks us to

do [something] and we don't really like it. It's not comfortable, it's not easy, and in our own estimation, it's not the best thing to do. But you know what? We don't have permission, we don't have the prerogative, to set aside the Word of God and do our own thing. At least [the disciples] were obeying.

Now, Mr. Self-Sufficiency's thoughts are that, "I need to figure out what's going on here. I need to understand what's happening before it happens. I need to understand the reasons why." But God just doesn't tell us all that. He just doesn't tell us those things.

You know, some people say, "But why?"

"I don't know," is the answer a lot of times. "I don't know. I know God knows everything and His way is best, His wisdom is perfect, and infinite, and He never makes a mistake. I do know that." That is the reason.

Now look at [Luke 9:]16: "Now He," that is, Jesus, "took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people." Now you can just see all those people, and all the disciples, looking at Jesus blessing the boy's lunch. They're probably thinking, "What's He going to do, eat in front of us?" I mean, He's got a lunch and He's saying thank-You. They're saying, "Maybe they're going to have a raffle or something and one person gets lunch. I don't know." They don't know what's happening. Jesus starts breaking the bread and handing the fish out as fast as He can, and the disciples realize [that] something is happening here. [The loaves and fish] are multiplying.

The verb here "kept giving" is a translation of what is called an "imperfect verb," which means "Jesus kept on giving, and giving, and giving," as fast as He could. As fast as His hands could move, bread and fish were coming out. The disciples then started getting baskets, loading them up, and they would take them to the groups of fifty and probably dump them out on a blanket, run back and get more. The disciples' eyes were probably just bugging out of their heads. They were probably shocked, and they were also probably ashamed to ask any questions.

Jesus is making bread and fish for the people, and *Jesus* is going to feed them. [The disciples] instantly realize their folly, how they relied on themselves, their own resources, their own ideas. They never looked to Jesus, they never trusted in Jesus. The disciples quickly begin to run from group to group, dumping fish and bread into these circles [of people], and there is a murmuring among the people, “Do you see what’s happening? Look at that—the bread, the fish—He’s just making more out of nothing!” And the people begin to praise God.

Someone takes the first bite and says, “It’s good! It’s really good!” So they all start stuffing their faces, and they’re all laughing, and they’re having a great time, and they’re praising God. “We’re eating miraculous food!” While the people are laughing, and rejoicing, and praising God, the disciples are carrying a burden. The wings of their joy are clipped because they know they never looked to Jesus.

Soon, Jesus starts slowing down as He sees that all the people are getting enough food, and the disciples are finished, and all of a sudden Jesus motions to them, “Come back, sit down, and eat with Me.” I imagine it was quiet [among the disciples]. They probably all ate with their heads hung low. Jesus was probably smiling, trying to make eye contact with someone. But they weren’t willing to look at Jesus in the face because they had been weighed in the balances and been found wanting. They trusted in themselves. They trusted in their resources. They trusted in their ingenuity, but they didn’t trust in Jesus. I’m sure the fish and bread tasted like humble pie. Jesus didn’t need to say a single word. The entire miracle was a huge rebuke, a sanctified “ninner ninner.”

But you know what? It got worse. Look at [Luke 9:]17: “And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.” John, in John 6:12, tells us that Jesus told the disciples to pick up the leftover bread. So they probably got up quietly, still ashamed, and still wincing with guilt, and as they collected the leftover food, Andrew was probably thinking to himself, “And I wanted to start a food collection.”

Philip was probably thinking to himself, “And I wanted to go to town and buy food.”

The rest of the disciples were probably thinking, “And we wanted to send [the crowd] away so that they wouldn’t be able to see and experience this miracle.”

As the people were giving the leftover food to the disciples who were picking [it] up in the baskets, they probably kept thanking the disciples, “Oh, thank you so much!”

And you know what [the disciples] were saying, “It wasn’t me. Don’t thank me; thank Jesus. No, I didn’t have anything to do with it. No, it wasn’t my idea; it was Jesus. It was Jesus.” Soon, all the circles were visited, and the Twelve headed back with baskets full of rebuke and shame to the Lord. Why? Because they didn’t trust in Jesus. There was far more food than the people could eat. Jesus provided for them all and the lesson [the disciples] learned that day, and a hard lesson it was, was that you must trust and marvel at the grace of Jesus, for it is always in abundance for those who ask for it. No matter how mundane or impossible the situation might be, we must look to Jesus and trust in Jesus. We look to Him in the first, we look to Him in the middle, we look to Him in the end, because His grace is sufficient [see 2 Corinthians 12:9], and it is only sufficient. And with the axe of repentance, we need to cut off the head of Mr. Self-Sufficiency, bury it in a grave, and never exhume him.

Arthur Bennett collected various Puritan prayers and arranged them in categories, and published them in a book entitled *The Valley of Vision*. I know many of you have that book. Some of you have the audio version by Max McLean. I would like to close with a prayer entitled “A Minister’s Confession”:

O God,
I know that I often do thy work
without thy power,
and sin by my dead, heartless, blind service,

my lack of inward light, love, delight,
my mind, heart, tongue moving
without thy help.

I see sin in my heart in seeking the approbation of others;
This is my vileness, to make men's opinion
my rule, whereas

I should see what good I have done,
and give thee glory,
consider what sin I have committed
and mourn for that.

It is my deceit to preach, and pray,
and to stir up others' spiritual affections
in order to beget commendations,
whereas my rule should be daily
to consider myself more vile than any man
in my own eyes.

But thou dost show thy power by my frailty,
so that the more feeble I am,
the more fit to be used,
for thou dost pitch a tent of grace
in my weakness.

Help me to rejoice in my infirmities
and give thee praise,
to acknowledge my deficiencies before others
and not be discouraged by them,
that they may see thy glory more clearly.

Teach me that I must act by a power supernatural,
whereby I can attempt things above my strength,
and bear evils beyond my strength,
acting for Christ in all,
and have his superior power to help me.

Let me learn of Paul

whose presence was mean,
his weakness great,
his utterance contemptible,
yet thou didst account him faithful and blessed.
Lord, let me lean on thee as he did,
and find my ministry thine.¹

Let's pray.

Father, we are grateful for Your goodness. We are thankful for the lessons that You taught the disciples that day when you fed the 5,000, and the lessons that we can learn from reading that account. Father, I just pray for those here who might not know You, who have never trusted You, not even for salvation. Who have never experienced any blessing, any fruit of the Spirit, any joy in knowing You. Father, I pray that right now You would grant them repentance, that they would see their sinfulness, that they would know that Christ is "the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father but through Him" [see John 14:6], that they would humble themselves right now before the throne of grace, that they would trust in Jesus and believe only in Him, that they would repent and believe. For without that, they will perish. Father, make it so in their lives, change them, and teach them from this day forth to walk for Jesus. And for the rest of us, help us to live for You, too, [and] to trust in Your Son. Help us to remember that we need You, [and that] without You we can do nothing, that it is not by our strength or our might, but by Your Spirit. Father, You have given us the resources but we must take them in hand, trusting in You for help to wield them. And, Father, that it is only in walking by Your Spirit with our hearts clean, confessed, and forgiven in Christ, that we can ever hope to give You glory. Yet, Father, You have given us all that we need to do that, so that we might live for You day in and day out, through every moment, through every action, through everything we purpose to do. And, Father, in doing that, we can give You great glory and, by Your grace, receive eternal

¹<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-religion/1383627/posts>

rewards because of it. May this church, may everyone here, be that kind of person. And, Father, may You receive all the glory, and honor, and praise because of it. We ask this in Christ's name, Amen.

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