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OUR INADEQUACY, CHRIST'S ADEQUACY

Luke 9:10-17

By

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Luke Lesson 41

Our Inadequacy, Christ's Adequacy
Luke 9:10-17

Do you ever feel overwhelmed with all that needs to be done in serving the Lord? We are needy people serving Christ in a needy world. Just this week we've heard of thousands killed and thousands more left homeless as a result of the hurricane in Central America. I often think of the billions who have yet to hear about the Savior. I feel overwhelmed with the immensity of the task and with my own inadequacy. How can I possibly meet the needs of this church, let alone the massive needs of this hurting world? Even the apostle Paul exclaimed, "Who is adequate for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16).

No passage of Scripture has had a more profound impact on my service for Christ than the gospel accounts of the feeding of the 5,000. It could be argued that it is the most significant miracle Jesus performed, since it's the only one God saw fit to record in all four gospels. I find myself coming back to its lessons again and again. Each time I come away refreshed as I recall how the Lord wants to give me His sufficiency for my insufficiency to meet the needs of this hurting world.

The Lord used this incident for the training of the twelve. We see this in His pointed challenge, "*You* give them something to eat!" John's account (6:6) tells us that Jesus was testing them (especially Philip), knowing what He was about to do. The miracle itself is almost passed over. We are never told exactly how Jesus did it. The focus is not on the spectacular nature of the miracle, but on what it teaches those who serve Jesus about how He meets the needs of others through them.

Christ will give us His adequacy to meet the needs of people if we yield our inadequacy to Him.

Three things stand out in this story: the needy multitudes; the inadequate disciples; and the adequate Savior.

1. People are needy.

The apostles returned from their first preaching tour and gave an account to Jesus of all that they had done (9:10). Jesus withdrew with them to the vicinity of Bethsaida, on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. Mark's account (6:31) tells us that the purpose of the getaway was rest. He also explains that there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and the disciples didn't even have time to eat. So they got in the boat and started off across the lake, a distance of four to five miles.

But the trip across the lake was the only vacation they got, since the people saw them going and ran there from all the cities and arrived ahead of them. When the disciples saw that crowd of needy people standing on the shore, they must have thought, "Oh, no! Lord, can we turn the boat around?"

The fact that this many people would go to this effort to be with Jesus shows how needy they were. If you had taken a survey of the crowd, many would have said that their greatest need was for physical healing. There were blind, deaf, lame, diseased and dying people there. By the end of the day, others would have said that their greatest need was for food. There was nothing to eat in that desolate place. But whether anyone recognized it or not, each person's greatest need was spiritual. Jesus could heal their bodies and fill their stomachs, but that was only a stopgap measure if they perished in their sins. So Jesus taught them about the kingdom of God, how they could rightly be related to Him (9:11).

Have you ever seen the bumper sticker, "Life is tough; then you die"? If a person does not know God and have the hope of eternal life, that bumper sticker is pretty close to the truth! Sin has taken a terrible toll on the human race. Often the problems people encounter can be the entry point for us to minister to them, not only physically or emotionally, but also spiritually, which is their greatest need. But that's where we encounter our own problem:

2. We are inadequate to meet the overwhelming needs of people.

Did you notice the contrast between Jesus' attitude toward the multitude and that of the disciples? Jesus welcomed them (9:11), but the disciples said to Jesus, "Send the multitude away" (9:12). It may be that the disciples were just being practical about how to

meet the needs of the crowd, but given the situation, I think we are warranted to read some exhaustion into their voices. They were spent. They wanted a break.

Then Jesus said something utterly ridiculous: "You give them something to eat" (9:13). "Say again, Lord?" "You give them something to eat." There were 5,000 men, plus women and children. If there were 2.5 children for each man and woman, we're talking about providing dinner for a crowd half the population of Flagstaff! That's enough people to fill the NAU Skydome to capacity, with some standing in the aisles! All the food the disciples could come up with was five loaves and two fish, which came from a little boy (John 6:9). The entire incident underscores the utter inadequacy of the disciples to meet this overwhelming need.

The manner in which Jesus performed this miracle is significant. He could have called down manna from heaven. Commentators point out that this miracle took place in the wilderness and that the 5,000, seated in companies, recalls Israel camped by tribes in the wilderness under Moses. Calling down manna would have fit the situation. It would have been easier on the twelve. It would have been more efficient. But He didn't do it that way.

Or, the Lord could have spoken the word and a loaf of bread would have miraculously appeared in each person's hand. Everyone would have been more awed at Jesus' power than they were with the quiet way this miracle was done. It would have been much more efficient and impressive than having the disciples distribute the bread and fish to this large crowd, which must have taken a long time.

Or Jesus could have called angels who could have taken the bread from His hand and flown directly to each group and given them the food. People would have been amazed. They would have talked about it for the rest of their lives. It would have been stupendous!

But how did Jesus do it? He used the disciples to distribute the bread and fish to the people. I'm convinced that the Lord did the miracle that way to teach the disciples that His method for meeting the needs of a lost world is through people. Christ meets

the needs of people through people. But note carefully the kind of people He uses: *Inadequate people!*

Jesus uses tired, emotionally drained people. The disciples had just returned from their first preaching tour. Jesus knew they were tired and needed a rest. But their only rest had been the short trip across the lake. True, Jesus let them rest all day as He taught and healed the multitude. But, still, their tiredness and emotional condition comes through in their request, "Send them away."

Jesus uses busy people. They didn't even have time to eat because of all the people coming and going. I thought that our hectic schedules were unique to our culture, but apparently not! I have worked as a banquet waiter, so I know that once they started handing out the food to this huge crowd, they were busy men! But invariably the Lord doesn't use people with extra time on their hands. He uses those who are busy and He keeps them busy. I'm sure that they didn't have time to eat until that entire crowd had been served.

Jesus uses people who lack resources. The disciples' comment about buying enough food for all these people was no doubt said with some sarcasm. They didn't have nearly enough money to do that. The other gospels report that they did a quick calculation and told Jesus that 200 denarii (seven to eight months' wages) would not be enough to give each person just a little bread. Obviously, the disciples didn't have anywhere near that much cash in hand. Besides, they were in a desolate place. Even if they went to Bethsaida to buy bread, there wouldn't be that much bread available. They were ridiculously lacking in the resources to meet Jesus' demand to feed the multitude.

Some people say, "I'll serve Jesus someday, but I'm too busy and stressed out to get involved right now." Or, they think, "I plan to give generously to the Lord's work after I get my finances in better shape. But right now I can't afford to give much." But they're making the mistake of thinking that serving Christ is something we volunteer to do when we have adequate time, energy, and financial resources. Then they'll choose to serve Him.

But Jesus doesn't work through people who choose to serve. He works through His servants. Servants don't volunteer to serve.

They don't tell their masters, "I'll clean your house and fix dinner tomorrow, but I'm too stressed out or busy today!" Servants serve when they're tired, emotionally drained, busy, and lacking in adequate resources. Servants serve because they're under obligation to their master.

How do we do it? By yielding our inadequacy to the Master to use as He pleases. Five small loaves and two fish, a boy's lunch—not much to feed such a crowd. Matthew records Jesus as saying, "Bring them here to Me!" That's the key! Give your inadequate resources and abilities to Jesus. The insufficient becomes more than sufficient when surrendered to Christ! That points us to the third prominent feature of this story, the adequate Savior:

3. Christ will give us His adequacy when we yield our inadequacy to Him to use as He pleases.

Two thoughts:

A. We must yield what we have, not what we don't have.

That sounds obvious, doesn't it? But so often we make up excuses about what we don't have and we fail to offer to Jesus what we do have. "If I just had more money, I'd give regularly to the church!" "If I just had the gift of evangelism, I'd witness more!" "If I just had the ability that others have, I'd serve the Lord." "If I just ..."! But Jesus didn't use all the bread in Bethsaida, which the disciples *didn't* have. He used the five loaves and two fish that they *did* have. Jesus doesn't ask you to give Him what you *don't* have. He asks you to give Him what you *do* have.

A country preacher went to a farmer in his church and asked, "If you had two farms, would you be willing to give one farm to God?" "Yes," replied the farmer. "I only wish I were in a position to do it." The preacher persisted, "If you had \$20,000, would you give \$10,000 to the Lord's work?" The farmer replied, "Yes, I'd love to have that kind of money! I'd gladly give \$10,000 to the Lord's work." Then the preacher sprung his trap: "If you had two pigs, would you give one to the Lord's work?" The farmer blurted out, "That's not fair! You know I've got two pigs!"

The Lord doesn't use what you don't have. He uses the inadequate things you have when you yield them to Him.

B. We must yield our inadequacy to Him to use as He pleases.

The disciples weren't giving the orders here. They were following Jesus' orders: "Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each." "Eat what, Lord?" "It won't work, Lord!" "I've got a better idea, Lord." No, they did what Jesus commanded. We need to yield ourselves to Him and let Him do as He sees fit. What Jesus did with this boy's lunch is what He does with us when we give Him our inadequate abilities and resources:

- Jesus blesses.

Without His blessing, we're wasting our time. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Ps. 127:1). Do you covet God's blessing in your life and labors for Him? A message by Watchman Nee, "Expecting the Lord's Blessing" (in *Twelve Baskets Full* [Hong Kong Church Book Room], vol. 2, pp. 48-64) has had a profound influence on me. Nee argues that everything in God's work depends upon His blessing. If it is there, even an insufficient amount is sufficient; if it is lacking, the greatest resources and efforts in the world will not be enough.

By God's blessing, Nee means a working of God that is far in excess of human calculations. If you scrape together 200 denarii and buy enough bread to give everybody a little bit, that is not God's blessing. But if there is no human way to explain the results in proportion to the gifts or working of those involved, that is God's blessing. It's not that we're sloppy about our work and expect God to cover for our laziness and incompetence. We ought to work hard and be skilled in what we do for the Lord. But to have God's blessing is not to expect results in proportion to my talents and labor, but in proportion to God's abundance.

So often we're just like the disciples. We see the need and start calculating with what we don't have. Pastors think, "If I just had Bill Gates in my congregation as a tither!" But as Nee points out, "If we have to accumulate sufficient wages to buy bread for the needy multitudes, years and years will elapse before their need is met. We must expect God to work beyond all that man can conceive" (*ibid.*, p. 63). Without the Lord's blessing, five loaves and two fish were woefully inadequate. With His blessing, it was

more than enough. May we covet God's blessing and examine ourselves to make sure that nothing in our lives hinders it!

- Jesus breaks.

Blessing and brokenness go together. You won't find God's blessing apart from God's breaking. You can see it in the lives of every person God has used. Abraham and Sarah had to be past their ability to produce a child before God gave them Isaac. Jacob had to be crippled in his hip before he prevailed with God. Moses had to fail in his own strength and spend 40 years tending sheep in the wilderness before God used him to deliver Israel.

Vance Havner observed, "God uses broken things. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume. It is Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever." (Source unknown.)

Most of us aren't too weak to serve the Lord. We're too strong, or at least we think we are. The Lord does not want our adequacy; He wants our inadequacy so that He can supply the adequacy. He puts His treasure in our weak, earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power is clearly from Him, not from us (2 Cor. 4:7). His strength is made perfect in our weakness when we yield ourselves to Him and allow Him to bless, break, multiply and distribute our few loaves and fishes to meet the needs of others. Jesus blesses; He breaks. Then,

- Jesus satisfies.

Jesus "kept giving them to the disciples to set before the multitude. And they all ate and were satisfied" (9:16b-17a). The "all" included the boy who gave up his lunch! Everyone had enough. They even had leftovers! No one went hungry.

Don't miss the end of verse 17: The leftovers added up to twelve baskets full. How many disciples? Twelve! How many baskets full? Twelve! A basket full for each disciple! But the disciples had to serve the hungry multitude *first*; only after that did they each collect their basket full. Sometimes we think, "If I give my time and energy and money to serve the Lord, what's in it for me?" As Jesus goes on to explain (9:24), "Whoever wishes to save

his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it." Lose yourself in service for Jesus and He will make sure you get a basket full after you're done!

The bread in this miracle is symbolic of Christ. He said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). The Lord is teaching us that if we will surrender ourselves to Him to use as He pleases in meeting the needs of others, then He will satisfy us with a full measure of Himself.

We hear a lot about "burnout" in our day. While we need adequate rest and time off, we can test our labors for the Lord by this: If we're burned out, there's a good chance we've been trying to meet human needs with our inadequate abilities and resources. But if we come away tired, yes, but with the satisfaction of the fullness of Christ left over in our souls, then the Lord's blessing was on us.

Conclusion

D. L. Moody was a man whom God greatly used. Thousands of people both in America and in England met the Savior through his tireless labors. But humanly speaking, Moody was a very inadequate man. One of nine children, his father died when he was four. He had little formal education. All his life his grammar was atrocious. What little religious education he received as a child was in a Unitarian church. At 17, he left home to work in a Boston shoe store. There, a Sunday School teacher called on him and presented the claims of Christ. In the back of that store, Moody trusted the Savior.

He applied to join a church, but they turned him down and kept him waiting ten months because he was so ignorant of the Bible. He moved to Chicago where, after work, he began to go out into the slums and gather the poor children to bring to Sunday School. A businessman who knew Moody before he became famous told of the first time that he saw him. Moody had gotten permission to hold a meeting in a little shanty that a saloonkeeper had abandoned. The businessman came in a little late and saw this heavysset man holding a small black boy in his arms. By the light of a few candles he was trying to read to him the story of the prodigal

son. He couldn't make out many of the words and had to skip them. The businessman thought, "If the Lord can use such an instrument as that for His honor and glory, it will certainly astonish me!"

After the meeting was over, Moody told the man, "I have only one talent; I have no education, but I love the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to do something for Him. Pray for me." Henry Varley, a good friend of Moody's in the early days of his work, once said to Moody, "It remains to be seen what God will do with a man who gives himself up wholly to Him." Moody thought about that and said, "By God's grace, I will be that man."

God may not call you to preach to thousands, as Moody did. But if you've tasted His mercy, He does call you to serve Him in some way. He wants to use you to give the Bread of Life to those who are hungry. The requirement is that you see how inadequate you are to do anything for Him. Then, yield your inadequacy to Him to use as He pleases. He will use you to help meet the needs of a hurting world. And He will give you a basket full of leftovers for yourself besides!

Discussion Questions

1. Since there are so many needs in the world, how do we know where to devote our time, effort, and money?
2. When is it right to say "no" to the needs and demands of people?
3. Are there areas of service you should refuse because you know that you are not so gifted? How do you know if God wants you to use you in a threatening area of service?
4. How can we truly experience God's blessing? Are there conditions we must meet? What are they?

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