

# Conference for Missionaries-1988- Discipleship - Part 2

by William MacDonald

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of discipleship, the role of the apostles in preaching the kingdom of God, and the sufficiency of the bread of life for everyone.*

**Duration:** 39:45

**Scripture:** Luke 9:1, Ephesians 3:8

**Topics:** "Discipleship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with just a few loaves of bread and fish. He emphasizes that the satisfaction provided by the living bread of Jesus is eternal, unlike the temporary satisfaction of physical food. The preacher also highlights the importance of not wasting resources, both in terms of physical food and the opportunities to evangelize. He encourages believers to have faith in Jesus' power to supply their needs and to have compassion for others, just as Jesus did. The sermon concludes with the reminder that God sends people into our lives for a purpose, and we should seek to discern that purpose through prayer.

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## Transcript

I like those words, within the sacred page, I seek the Lord. Nice to get beyond the black type on the white page and find the Lord. Not going to the Bible just as a piece of literature, but as a search for Him.

Shall we turn back again tonight to Luke chapter 9, please? We just got to the first three verses, so I think I'll begin at the beginning. If you don't mind, Luke chapter 9, verse 1. Then he called his twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

He said to them, Take nothing for the journey, neither staff nor bag nor bread nor money, and do not have two tunics apiece. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. Whoever will not receive you when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.

So they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. Now Herod the Tetrarch heard of all that was done by him, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old

prophets had risen again. And Herod said, John, I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things? And he sought to see him.

The apostles, when they had returned, told him all that they had done, and he took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. When the multitudes knew it, they followed him, and he received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who had need of healing. When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to him, Send the multitude away that they may go into the surrounding towns and country and lodge and get provisions, for we are in a deserted place here.

He said to them, You give them something to eat. They said, We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people. For there were about five thousand men, and he said to his disciples, Make them sit down in groups of fifty.

And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude. So they all ate and were filled.

Twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them. We look first of all, then, at verse 4. Whatever house you enter, stay there and from there depart. It's interesting to me that the same God who legislates about a bird's nest in the Old Testament is interested in the accommodation of his servants in the New Testament.

Part of their wages would be the hospitality that would be shown to them, and he gives them instructions concerning that hospitality. They're not to shop around for the best. If a house receives them, they're to go in there and stay there and from there depart.

Although their ministry would be primarily a ministry of giving, they must also learn to receive graciously, too. Sometimes this is hard in the work of the Lord. The poet said, I count him great who for love's sake can give with generous, earnest will.

But he who takes for love's sweet sake, I think I count more generous still. And there's a certain element of truth in that. Then, wherever they were rejected, they were to shake the very dust from their feet as a testimony against the people.

This teaches us that we are not obligated to force the gospel on people when they don't want it. They do deserve a valid, bona fide presentation of the gospel, but there are circumstances in life when they turn on the gospel messenger and, as it were, rend him, and he's not responsible to continue that. I think that's borne out, is it not, in 2 Corinthians 2, verses 14 through 16? 2 Corinthians 2, verses 14 through 16.

Now, thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing. That's the shock part of the verse, isn't it? We're the fragrance of Christ to God, not only among those who are being saved, but among those who are perishing.

To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and the other aroma of life to life, and who is sufficient for these things. We have a tendency to judge a man's effectiveness, a person's effectiveness, by the number of souls he wins to Christ. But doesn't this verse teach that God judges also by the number who receive a bona fide presentation of the gospel, even if they don't accept it? I think that's implicit in this verse in Luke,

chapter 9. Whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.

And so there they go. They departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. It's really interesting in this chapter the emphasis on preaching the gospel, preaching the kingdom of God.

These men knew what was central. They knew what to preach. They didn't preach psychology.

They didn't preach self-esteem. They didn't preach a good self-image. They didn't even preach current theological trends on the continent.

They preached the gospel. It's the word of God that men need, men and women today. They need to hear the word of God.

We live in a world that is increasingly illiterate as far as the Bible is concerned. It's certainly true here in the United States. When our young men go out onto the campus, they're going out to people who don't know the Bible.

They haven't the foggiest notion about the Bible, and they have to begin at the beginning. Thank God for those who stay close to the word of God and preach the word of God. When we come to verse 7, the connection is rather unclear, isn't it? Now, we believe that throughout the gospels there is a continuous flow of thought.

After all, the gospels are not a series of isolated incidents pieced together with scissors and paste. The spirit of God is weaving a spiritual message through it all. And I'm sure that some of you here tonight can tell me the connection between verses 7 through 9 and what preceded.

I'm glad you can, because I can't. It's very difficult for me, the flow of thought, the continuity there. But in all my ignorance, we might draw one or two lessons.

First of all, I think it's very good to see that John the Baptist's ministry was still going on, in a sense, wasn't it? Although he had been put to death, his ministry was still continuing. That's a wonderful thing about the life of faith and a life dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ, that the ministry can go on long after our lips are silenced in the grave. He being dead yet speaketh.

Another lesson I learned from this is that we can never really effectively know the results of our ministry down here. John the Baptist didn't know, for instance, when he left this scene, how his life and testimony would affect Herod in days to come. He didn't know that.

And there's a lesson in that for us. Heaven is the best and safest place to learn the results of our ministry. A third lesson we can learn from this verse of Scripture is that the rejection of John the Baptist, the execution of John the Baptist, was a forepicture of what was going to happen to the Lord Jesus.

If they treated the forerunner that way, they would treat the Lord himself that way. And perhaps that is part of the thread which you have in this chapter, because in later verses, the Lord Jesus once and again tells them exactly what is going to happen to them. Interesting how the news of Jesus' ministry tormented Herod.

He was haunted by the memory of the past, and he sought to see him. But his seeking to see him, of course, was not sincere. It was not the seeking of a broken sinner.

Verse 10. The apostles, when they had returned, told him all that they had done, and he took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. I think there's a suggestion here that the importance, under certain circumstances, of coming aside and being before the Lord.

I believe that many missionaries and Christian workers have been lost to the work of God because they were too spiritual to take a change of pace. Garvey said something to that effect. He said a time of retirement is a very good thing in our service.

It puts us before God instead of putting our work before us. And it makes us feel, too, that our work is in His hands and not our own. He said, I remember when I used to be ill every year, and I always felt if I had been near enough to God, the illness would not have been necessary.

Verse 11. But when the multitudes knew it, they followed him, and he received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who had need of healing. Interruption, right? He had taken the disciples aside.

They were going to have a time of rest and rehabilitation and relaxation, and here the multitude is there. Interruption. Are you annoyed by interruptions in the work of the Lord? Well, the Lord Jesus never was, was he? In fact, as you read the Gospels, he never had any interruptions in that sense.

But I believe the secret for him was that every morning he opened his ears to receive instructions from God the Father for that day, and then whatever happened during the day, he took it as the will of God for him. And here, when the multitudes pressed in upon him as he went away in private with his disciples, he realized that was part of God's will. Some time ago in Reader's Digest there was this article about interruptions well worth remembering.

When you are exasperated by interruptions, try to remember that their frequency may be an indication of the valuableness of your life. Only the people who are full of help and strength are burdened by other people's needs. The interruptions which we chafe at are the credentials of our indispensability.

Good. The greatest condemnation that anyone could incur, and it's a danger to guard against, is to be so independent, so unhelpful, that nobody ever interrupts us, and we're left comfortably alone. There was a dear Christian sister, and she was leading a very busy life.

She had her housework to do, and she did a lot of book work at home as a result, and she was harried by it all. And one day her husband came home early and unexpectedly, and she looked up from her work and she said, What are you doing here? And he said with a wry smile, I live here. And she said that that was a lesson to her because she decided that any time he came home after that, no matter how early and unexpectedly, she would put aside her work and let him know that she considered that he was tops.

Dr. Becker from Yankundi was here with us last night. Before he went home to be with the Lord, Bill Sees was speaking at Bethany Chapel in Oakland, and he said that on Dr. Becker's desk there in Africa was this little motto. It said, The Jesus, not only of Calvary, but of the workshop, the roads, the crowds, the clamorous demands and surly opposition, the lack of all peace and privacy, the interruptions.

For this, so strangely unlike anything we can attribute to the divine life in itself, is apparently not only light, but is the divine life operating under human condition. And I like what J. Oswald Sanders said. He said, Up to some time ago, he was always annoyed by interruptions, which he felt was merely a form of selfishness on his part.

People used to walk in and say, Well, I had two hours to wait between trains, so I thought I'd come and see you. He said, That used to bother me. Then the Lord convinced me that God sends people our way.

He sent Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. He sent Barnabas to look up Saul of Tarsus. The same applies today.

God sends people our way. So he said, When somebody comes in, I say, The Lord must have sent you here for some purpose. Let's pray and find out what that purpose is.

And he says this does two things. He says, First of all, it puts the interview on a different level, because God is brought into it. Also, it generally shortens the interview.

If a person knows that you're looking for a reason why he's there under God, if he doesn't have one, he soon leaves for greener pastures. So take interruptions from the Lord. Then they belong in your schedule, because God was simply rearranging your daily pattern to suit himself.

To the alert Christian, interruptions are only divinely interjected opportunities. And I think you have that illustrated here in the case of the feeding of the 5,000. The multitudes knew it.

They followed him. He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who had need of healing. Now, it's interesting that the feeding of the 5,000 comes here and in all the Gospels.

It must be important, must convey important spiritual lessons, because we do find it in all the Gospels. Shall we try to list some of the lessons we learn from the feeding of the 5,000? First of all, the people, the 5,000 men plus women and children, represent the spiritually starving multitude who are always with us. Always with us.

Two, the disciples represent faithful followers of the Lord Jesus with seemingly pitiful resources. We went over that last night, didn't we? And we said that the more primitive the materials and the more limited the resources, God could do more with it. In the feeding of the 4,000 and the feeding of the 5,000, you have that contrast.

The less the Lord had to work with, the more he fed and the more was left over. We often think, okay, I just had more money. If I just had more material things, I could do more for the Lord, and it isn't the way it works, is it? The less the Lord has to work with, the more he can accomplish with it, and the more there is left over.

The disciples represent faithful followers of the Lord Jesus with seemingly pitiful resources. But ever and always there is the compassionate Savior. The compassionate Savior.

He wasn't irritated by the crowd. The disciples were, but he wasn't. He wasn't annoyed.

His heart went out to them. Do we share the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do we pray, let me look on the crowd as my Savior did, till my eyes with tears grow dim? Let me view with pity the wandering sheep and love them for love of him. Can we say in the words that have been put into Paul's mouth, only

like souls I see the folk thereunder bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings, hearing their one hope with an empty wonder, sadly contented with a show of things.

Then with a rush, the intolerable craving shivers throughout me like a trumpet call, O to save these, to perish for their saving, die for their life, be offered for them all. And then number four, you have the Lord's command, give you, you give them something to eat. You give them something to eat.

And what that really is, is a restatement of the Great Commission, isn't it? A restatement of the Great Commission. What an honor that we who are the least of saints should have this privilege of giving the multitude to eat. Number five, he made them sit down in groups of 50.

This rather speaks to me today because a great emphasis, even in the assembly today, is building mega-churches, huge churches. Several services on Lord's Day morning, you know, this type of thing. It certainly doesn't seem to fit with the pattern of Scripture.

The Lord Jesus made them sit down in groups that were easily administered. It's typical of Americans to be thinking in big terms, but I think of the servant of the Lord who said, I loathe this scramble for numbers. I see now emphasis on huge churches, perhaps small but growing assembly is what we have in the New Testament.

I'm afraid today we're too occupied, preoccupied with big numbers. We judge success by numbers, and our outlook has become more statistical than spiritual. In fact, that's a very strong emphasis today.

Telemarketing, how to form a new assembly. You call 20,000 phone numbers. Of those, you are guaranteed that 200 will come on your opening day, and you'll keep 100 of them.

Scripture please? There's no Scripture. It's not God's way, but this is the whole emphasis today, and not very far away from us either. He made them sit down in groups of 50.

Let us learn a lesson from that. Maybe it's a good thing when an assembly is planted to set as one of the ground rules that when it reaches a certain number, immediately we'll think in terms of hiding off as long as there is adequate spiritual leadership to do it. Number six, if we give Jesus what we have, he can multiply it to feed the spiritually hungry multitude.

You've seen that in your work. You've seen the multiplication process going on. You've seen sacrificial gifts.

You've been the recipient of gifts from widows, oftentimes from those who could least afford it, and you've seen it used and greatly multiplied in the work of the Lord. The feeding of the 5,000 is not ancient history. It's current events going on all over the world where consecrated money is multiplied by the Savior.

A poet has said, "'Twas springtime when he blessed the loaves. "'Twas harvest when he broke." Beautiful, isn't it? But that's exactly what happened. I learn also in the feeding of the 5,000 that the Lord expects us to do what we can do.

He puts the disciples to work. He expects us to do what we can do. Then he will do what we can't do.

And number eight, I like to see in this that the bread of life is sufficient for everyone, not just for the elect, but for everyone. I find it very interesting when I hear people pushing Calvinism to the extremes, the limited atonement, and all the rest. The problem that keeps men on stage is not election, but their own

stubborn will.

Jesus made that clear. He said, "If you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and these are they that testify of me, and you don't want to come to me that you might have life." He didn't say, "You can't come to me because you aren't elect." Nonsense. And he didn't say, "You can't come to me because there are intellectual problems." The problem wasn't in their intellect.

The problem wasn't in their mind. It was in their will. That's true with every unsaved person today.

God makes a bona fide offer of the gospel to every man and woman, boy and girl in the world. And there isn't a person living in the world who, if he repented of his sins and received the Lord Jesus, wouldn't be saved. I see in this also that the 5,000 men, plus women and children, had their hunger satisfied for a few hours, but those we feed with the bread of life are satisfied eternally.

That's wonderful, isn't it? John, chapter 14, verse 12. John 14, 12. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also, greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father.

And whatsoever you ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." I haven't got quite the right verse there, but it's close. It is true, the 5,000 had their hunger satisfied for a few hours, those we feed with the living bread are satisfied eternally. Number 10, the fragments that were left over were greater than he started with.

God is a bountiful giver, yet notice that nothing was wasted. Gather up the fragments that remain. Waste is sinful.

Whole countries of the world today could be evangelized with the waste that goes on in the United States. Number 11, disciples of the Lord Jesus never need to doubt his power to supply their needs. I think this is one of the reasons in the flow of thought in this chapter.

Why is this brought so forcibly before the disciples? Because the Lord Jesus is going to lead, he's going to go back to heaven, the disciples are going to be here, the Holy Spirit will be given. With such a Lord Jesus, they never need to worry about the supply of their needs. If he can feed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, he can provide for his trusting servants under any circumstance, and will, too, as they walk in fellowship with him.

Those who serve him need never worry where their food is coming from. Did he not say in Matthew 6:33, Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness on all these things shall be added unto you? God is a faithful God, and a faithful provider. Verses 18 through 31 are generally considered to be the high-water mark of the Savior's teaching ministry.

He had been teaching them, teaching them, teaching them up to this point, and now comes Peter's great confession of him at Caesarea Philippi. Let's read it, beginning in verse 18. It happened as he was alone praying that his disciples joined him, and he asked them, saying, Who do the crowds say that I am? They answered and said, John the Baptist.

Some say Elijah. Others say that one of the old prophets is risen again. Nothing unique, just a man among men, nothing greater than that.

He said to them, Who do you say that I am? Peter answered, The Christ of God. And he strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised the third day. It was of paramount importance that the disciples should have a genuine conviction as to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what this is all about. If the Lord Jesus is the Christ of God, then they're on the winning side. They could go forth in triumph, knowing that although the waves might seem to be against them, the tide was sure to win.

The Lord Jesus is the Christ of God. They could know that no one could be successfully against them, and they could know, too, as he goes on to develop in the passage, that no matter what lay in the meantime in their pathway, they were assured of coming glory. Wonderful, isn't it? Really wonderful.

And it was on this truth, embodied in Peter's confession, that the church is built. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The Apostle Paul had a twofold ministry, which I see here in germ form. It's found in Ephesians chapter 3, and it should be the twofold ministry of everyone of us, I believe. Ephesians chapter 3, verses 8 and 9. To me who am less than the least of all the saints this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ.

You see it? You see the twofold ministry that was there? Verse 8, the gospel, that I might preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. 9. The church. To make all men see what is the administration or fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ.

We must keep our priorities straight. Our task is to preach the gospel, and see New Testament assemblies established, and everything else is secondary. I don't mean trivial, I don't mean unimportant, but everything else is secondary to that.

In verse 21, the Lord Jesus speaks very frankly to them, doesn't he? He straightly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed. You know, it's a good thing that there isn't a period there after killed. That would have been enough to doom any ministry, wouldn't it? Just a period there would have been enough to doom any crusade.

But it doesn't stop there. He raised again the third day. Somebody said, Jesus never hid his scars to make disciples.

Jesus never hid his scars to make disciples, and he didn't. And he didn't put all the best berries on the top of the box, either, did he? He told it the way it was. And if they're going to be his followers, they're going to go through what he went through.

He was going to suffer many things, be rejected, be killed, but he raised the third day. The first part of the verse is grim. The last part of the verse is all the difference.

It makes all the difference in the world, and it's the certainty of the Savior's resurrection that makes it all worthwhile. And so he goes on to explain to them that if they are going to follow him, they must know that this is the pathway to glory. I don't suppose we ever get used to it, do we? It goes so across the grain of nature, and yet wasn't it the Savior who said, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.

But if it dies, it bringeth forth much fruit. They must know that the pathway to glory is through denial of self, taking up the cross daily, and losing one's life for his sake. And then, quickly, in verses 24 through 27, I think the Lord Jesus looked into the faces of those Jewish disciples, and he saw that there would be two great hindrances to them in the pathway of discipleship.

Two considerations that might deflect them from wholehearted commitment to him. One was the love of money. The other was shame over him and his cause.

As for the first, he pointed out, it would be a poor bargain to gain the whole world and lose one's life. And as for the second, he warned that shame of him now would mean shame from him or by him then. We often use that verse, verse 25 in the gospel, as perfectly legitimate in the gospel, as an application.

What advantage is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? But it was really spoken to those who are already disciples, wasn't it? And he's not talking about the salvation of the soul, he's talking about the salvation of the life here on earth. He's not talking about eternal damnation, but about damage in this life. And it reminds us that it's possible for a man's soul to be saved and his life to be lost, his life to be frittered away on nonessentials, on that which is passing, on that which is of no eternal consequence.

And so we see the way the Lord Jesus is leading the disciples along. He's telling them that his pathway must be their pathway, and that the way up is down by the way of denial. Self-denial, taking up the cross, following him, and refusing the lust for material things, for money and material things, and refusing to be ashamed of Jesus, that blessed name on whom our hopes of heaven depend.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for the incomparable words of the Lord Jesus Christ. We marvel at how relevant they are to life here, the day in which we're living. We pray that at the beginning, beyond this sacred page, we seek the Lord.

We thank you that we've seen the Lord in this wonderful passage of Scripture. We pray that we indeed might continue to respond to his call, and never turn back, having put our hands to the plow. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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