

He welcomed them

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in Luke chapter 9, and I want us again, just as we're working through here, look at from verse 10 through to verse 26.

Just read a little at the beginning, and then, On their return, the apostles told them all that they had done. And as we remember, we were looking last time at how Jesus had sent out the twelve together, and he had given them power and authority over all the demons to cure diseases and to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

Well, here we have, On their return, the apostles told them all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. And when the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom and cured those.

Who needed healing, and so on. Now, we're picking up here this verse, verse 10, on the return of the apostles from that tremendous mission that they had been on.

And we highlighted that this chapter marks a turning point in the life of Jesus, where he is moving from his ministry in Galilee, and he's going to start making his way up to Jerusalem.

[1 : 25] Because at verse 21, he told them again about his death. Every so often, Jesus would break in, and he would tell his disciples what his mission was really about.

In the earlier stages, they weren't grasping it, but verse 21, he tells them, The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

So that, and again in verse 51, we mentioned this before, So this is a chapter that changes, as it were, the work and the ministry of Jesus.

He's leaving Galilee. And that's why we said it was like in the beginning of chapter 9, It's a farewell mission to the streets and to the cities and to the towns of Galilee.

Jesus is going to leave the Capernaums and leave the Canaan and leave the Nazareth and leave all these communities where he had worked for so long, ministering and healing and teaching.

[2 : 39] And it's like a final concentrated effort where he sends out his disciples, because he's now going to move from that part and then move towards Jerusalem. But on the return, the apostles told him all that they had done, and he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida.

So you may say, well, why did they withdraw? Why did he withdraw them? And I believe the very simple reason was to recharge the batteries. Because the demands of spiritual work, it is essential that batteries are recharged, because the very nature of this work is a work of giving.

And I think we all know that if you keep on giving and giving and giving, eventually you run out. It's the same. It doesn't matter what it is that you're doing. If you're keeping giving and giving, unless you renew and unless you recharge, there's nothing left.

And so we find Jesus in a very simple way saying, look, we've got to withdraw. And it was a time of reflection and a time of renewing. Somebody very wisely said, if you don't get into the habit of coming apart, then you will come apart.

And then we find, I say, go to this town, Bethsaida, that the crowds learned where they were, and the crowds make their way to Jesus. And I love what it says here at the beginning of verse 11.

[4 : 01] When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them. Isn't that lovely? He welcomed them. There might have been others. Maybe, I don't know the attitude of the disciples, but maybe some of the disciples were saying, oh, no, here's another crowd coming.

But that's not the attitude of Jesus. Jesus welcomed every single one of them. And he's still the same today. You may be saying in your own heart, I wonder if Jesus would welcome me.

Yes, he would. If you come to Jesus, and remember, if you come to Jesus, you're coming to him by faith. You cannot come to Jesus except by faith.

It is faith, isn't it, that's taking you to him. Because you're believing that he is. You're believing who he is. If you're going to Jesus, you're believing what he has done.

That's what's taking you to Jesus, isn't it? And so there's a faith that is taking you, as it were, to Jesus. But maybe you're saying to yourself, oh, but what if he won't welcome me?

[5 : 07] Because I don't have the knowledge. I don't have the understanding. I maybe don't have the background that others do. That doesn't matter. The important thing is that you go to Jesus, and if you go to Jesus, he will welcome you.

You've got to remember that. Because sometimes we can tie ourselves into all kinds of knots and look at all and think about how we are and say, well, I don't know that much.

I look at other people. I'm looking today at other people in the church. Maybe that's what you're saying. And I think of them and I say to them myself, oh, well, they know so much. I can imagine them being able to pray so well.

I can't pray well. All you need to do, my friend, is just go to Jesus, just as you are. And he tells us he welcomed them. Now, in verse 12, then, as we read on, we find that as he's dealing with all the people who come, he spoke to them of the kingdom and cured those who needed healing.

The day began to wear away. And the twelve came and said to him, look, you're going to have to send the crowd away into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provision, for we're in a very desolate place.

[6 : 28] It must have been a very isolated area they were in. So the disciples are saying to Jesus, look, you've spent all day with the crowd. Just send them away now, because we've got nothing for them.

But Jesus wasn't going to send them away. Because really, if Jesus was going to send people away who had spent the whole day listening to him, the whole day with him, it would almost be a denial of who he is himself.

Because Jesus, while he cares for us spiritually, he also cares for us temporarily. And we mustn't forget that. It's not just about our soul.

Yes, primarily it's about our soul. Because we see later on, what will it profit a man if he gains a whole world and loses or forfeits himself, or translated elsewhere, or loses his own soul.

For what will a person give in exchange for a soul? The soul is the most important thing that we have. Let's never forget that.

[7 : 36] And that is the primary purpose of Jesus' coming into this world, was to save our souls. But Jesus is also concerned.

Not just about our soul, but about our welfare, about our world that we live in, about our homes, about our health, about everything.

That's why we're told we are to bring everything to him in prayer. So Jesus isn't just going to deal with these people purely with their soul and then say, Well, that's all I've got for you.

You're on your own now. Away you go. You remember in James, when we were looking in James, James said that if a brother or a sister be naked, in other words, if they have no clothing and they have absolutely no food, it's an inconsistent thing to see this person lying there.

They've got no food and they've got no clothing. And you say to them, Ah, all the best depart in peace. And that you don't actually go and give them some clothing, if you have some to give.

[8 : 44] And give them some food. Because what James is saying is, It's a denial of your faith. Faith without works is dead. If you have real living faith, you will practice what you preach and say, Well, Jesus is concerned about you.

He's concerned about your soul. But he's also concerned about your body. Here, there's a jumper. Put it on. Get warm. You want something to eat? Well, there you are. I'll bring you something to eat. And that is living out. This is what James is saying. It is living out your faith. Well, Jesus did exactly that. And so Jesus is going to provide for all these people.

And Jesus won't send them away hungry. Now, this is an incident that all the gospel writers home in on, the feeding of the thousands. And we're told in John's gospel that Jesus asked Philip what they were going to do.

Jesus was testing Philip to see if he, if Philip's faith was great enough. Philip had seen Jesus at work in so many different occasions.

[9 : 56] And he's saying to Philip, What are we going to do? Jesus, of course, knew already what he was going to do. And I think that's a very comforting thing for us. Because in John's gospel, it

tells us when he asked Philip, it says this, For he himself knew what he would do.

And that is true of every situation and every circumstance in life. Jesus himself knew, or Jesus himself knows what he will do.

Maybe today you're in a situation where you do not know what you're going to do. Because you're facing issues, and you're facing problems, and you're facing difficulties, and you're maybe beside yourself, and you're saying, I don't know what's going to happen.

Remember, Jesus knows. Jesus has already worked out what is going to happen. And that is why we must develop this trust in him, this implicit trust, so that we say, Well, Lord, I don't understand here, but I'm in this journey with you.

Lord, you take control, and I'll follow. And if we live in this way and trust in this way, the Lord will indeed demonstrate and show his own leadership, his own control in these things.

[11 : 20] And it's also interesting that Jesus performs this miracle by using what was already there. There were five loaves and two fish.

Now, obviously, at a human level, for thousands of people, that isn't enough. But I think the point that we see here is that Jesus works a miracle with something that is already there.

And somebody has very wisely said this, Before we ask God to do the impossible, let's start with the possible and give him what we have.

I think that's very good. Before we ask God to do the impossible, let's start with the possible and give him what we have. And as the disciples, and the crowd looked, remember that there was this, we're told elsewhere about this, it was a little boy who had the five loaves and the two fish.

And that's, I think, a great lesson for us. Because so often we feel we have so little to give the Lord. I'm sure that there are many Christians who are holding themselves back from any form of Christian service because they feel that they have so little to give.

[12 : 45] No, that's all wrong. This boy who went forward with the five loaves and two fishes, that's all he had. Whether he had just joined this crowd and he was making his way home with them, I don't know.

But that's all they had. In Jesus' hands, the little that we have can become great. Jesus hasn't stopped working like this.

And I'm sure that there are many in the church today as they look back they're amazed at where they are in the church, where they are in their Christian life. And they are where they are because they've, as it were, said to the Lord, well, Lord, use me.

I don't feel of much use. But it's incredible how the Lord is able to use irrespective of how limited we may feel.

And, you know, we've always got to remember that when we are dealing with the Lord, we're dealing with the one. who is able to make great things out of little and even make great things out of nothing.

[13 : 54] We must never lose sight of the fact that he is creator God. This very world that we live in was made out of nothing. It's quite extraordinary.

God spoke into the emptiness that was there. God said, let there be. And I'm often, I often, I simply cannot get, I'm not going to go down this road just now, but I simply cannot get my head round how people will spend all the great and incredible intelligence they have, the resources they have, in trying to find some other explanation as to how this world came into being and how the human race began.

When it is set out, to me, there is no other altogether away from the whole aspect of faith. We have such a clear account in God's word.

In the beginning, God. God said, God said, God said, let there be, let there be, let there be. And there was.

This is the God that we, the unchanging God we come to. So God can make out of nothing. He also makes out of what is already there.

[15 : 16] Every man in here. In a sense, if we go right back, we go back to Adam. How did God make Adam? Well, he made Adam differently to the way he made this world.

He made this world out of nothing. But he didn't make Adam out of nothing. He made him from the dust to the ground. And from the dust to the ground, he formed man.

When we die, we go back to the dust. Every woman, when you trace going back to Eve, how did God make Eve? Again, he made, not out of nothing, out of something.

Remember how he put Adam to sleep, and from Adam he took a bone. And from that, the word is what he made. The word is he fashioned, he built. It's like something that he took delight and care in.

And so, this is the God that we worship. This is the Lord who is able, as we say, to make something out of nothing, or to make something out of what is already there.

[16:20] And we must never lose sight of that. And so, the Lord is the one who is performing this great miracle. And then we find that he makes everyone sit down, and when they did so, he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said, a blessing over them.

You know, it's a great thing to say that. And we still do that, and we always ought to do that, to ask God to bless. Do we say our grace?

I hope everybody in here asks the Lord. And, in everything, we ought to be giving God thanks, because God has enriched our lives in a wonderful way.

We have so much. We so often take what we have for granted. The Lord is saying to us in his word, beware that you forget not the Lord your God, because it is God who gives you.

Whatever we have in this world, let us remember that God is the one who has given. He either gives it to us in a wonderful way by gift, or else he gives us the capacities and the abilities to get on and to do.

[17:36] And it's a wonderful thing when you see people's abilities, whether it is skill with hands, or whether it is tremendous mental powers, and you see what people just sometimes when you stand back and watch what people have made and what they've formed and what they've developed, whether it's in science and technology, all these things, and you say, what a mind!

But it's God who has given people these minds in all the different areas and different fields. And we've always got to acknowledge, God is looking to us to give Him thanks for these things. And it will enrich our world. It will make our lives much more spiritual so that even in all the physical, everyday things, there is a spiritual link when we're seeing God and acknowledging God and thanking God for all the abilities.

It doesn't matter what gift or what ability you have. Remember, ultimately, it is from God. You must never lose sight of that because we are physically made by God.

We are mentally made by God. And so all the different capacities and gifts and abilities are at the end of the day God-given. And so we find Jesus that He gives thanks and then He takes the bread and He begins to distribute it and He gave it to the disciples and the disciples gave it to the crowd.

[19:09] And you know, in a sense here, we're seeing the very, we're seeing Jesus as giving a physical presentation of how things happen spiritually. That's what's happening, hopefully, here today.

Where the bread of life, and that's Jesus, Jesus Himself is the bread of life. Where Jesus is giving of Himself through the preaching to people.

We must not lose sight of that. This is still the way, the distribution, as it were, of the gospel. Through those that the Lord sends out with it.

So that that means that before I preach, I have to go to the Lord and ask the Lord, Lord, help me, give me the mind, give me the understanding, open the word to me.

in order that I might be able to share your word with others. That's how it is. And that's exactly what we have this picture here.

[20:13] Jesus, who is the bread of life. Now again, He was giving physical bread for their body's use. But elsewhere, Jesus was pointing to the fact that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.

That we ultimately live in Jesus because Jesus said, I am the bread of life. Let me ask you before we move from this, today do you have an appetite for the bread of life for Jesus?

It's not a good thing when we lose our appetite. In fact, very often when a person becomes unwell, that's one of the things that accompanies, one of the, sometimes one of the first signs is a person's appetite goes.

They begin to lose their normal appetite. Sometimes people will go to the doctor for no other reason and they'll say, I don't know what's happened, but I've just lost my appetite.

It's often an indication there's something wrong. Have you lost your appetite for Jesus? Or today, do you have an appetite for God's Word?

[21 : 28] Is God's Word real and special to you? Did you this morning get up and did you look at your Bible, did you read your Bible, or did you have an anticipation of coming to God's house saying, Lord, today I want to go to your house in order that I may hear something from my soul?

Did you come today saying, Lord, Lord, speak to me? Whether it's through the singing or the reading or the preaching of the Word, but Lord, make your Word come into my heart.

Give me a portion for today. Or, did that not happen? Did you just come to God's house? Well, if you didn't come prayerfully, expectantly, the Lord may give you something, but he may not.

It is so important, so vitally important, and if we have a spiritual appetite for the things of the Lord, we will prepare before we come. Because sometimes people will go to God's house and they say, ah, you know, I've got nothing.

But did they prepare? It's the same way, did I prepare? And it's so vital that both preacher and hearer, they've all got to prepare, because we're coming to deal with spiritual issues, spiritual things.

[22 : 51] And so the Lord Jesus there is, as we say, is handing the food to the disciples, and they are handing it on. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Isn't that amazing? Twelve baskets, twelve disciples handing out, and each disciple. They must have been amazed when they saw that, when they gathered it up. There were twelve disciples handing out, twelve disciples would have been gathering up what was left, and everybody's basket was still full.

And I believe, maybe it's only just a thought there, but you know, when you're actually dealing with the Lord, or preaching, or sharing God's word, you know, when you share God's word with somebody, the Lord will fill your basket as well.

It's an amazing thing. This is the way it works. And you will often find that, that when you maybe have gone to somebody, and you've shared some spiritual experience, you've shared some insight into the truth that you've been given, you actually find that your own soul has been nourished as well, and you feel the better of it.

And that's what happened in the experience of the disciples. Their own baskets were full as well at the end. And then we find Jesus alone with the disciples, move very quickly, and he's asking them, who do the crowds say that I am?

[24 : 18] Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, one of the prophets of old. Then he said, who do you say I am? And Peter said, the Christ of God. It's vital that we know who Jesus is.

We cannot know God apart from knowing Jesus. A person cannot ultimately be right with God. wrong about Jesus. You can't be right with God and wrong about Jesus. Because Jesus is the way to God. And we find that Peter makes this great confession.

Peter said that you are the Christ of God. Isn't that wonderful? Now here's Peter, and Peter is a great man, a good man, but Peter as we know wasn't perfect.

Peter had his blemishes and his faults. Peter had his faults and his failings. But Peter knew one thing, that Jesus Christ was the Christ of God.

[25 : 27] And Peter staked his all on that. Do you today know Jesus Christ as the Christ of God? Not just that Jesus was a good man, that he was not just an amazing teacher, that he wasn't just a miracle worker, but that he was and that he is the Christ of God.

Because for your salvation it is essential to know that very thing, that Jesus Christ is the Christ of God. He is the Messiah. He is the anointed one.

He is the only way of salvation. And then Jesus, he foretells his death and what's to happen to him. And then in light of that, in light of his rejection, in light of these things, he then talks about taking up the cross and following himself.

Now, I'm not going to say much here because not long ago, looking in Mark's gospel, we considered similar verses. Very briefly, in conclusion, Jesus is here giving us what we may term conditions of service.

When we're speaking to the young people today, we were talking about counting the cost. Well, in a sense, that's what Jesus is doing here. Jesus is saying, in order to follow me, you have to be prepared to deny yourself and take up the cross and follow me.

[26 : 56] Sometimes we would prefer not to dwell upon the denying and the cross-bearing. Sometimes we prefer to dwell upon the good things that are part and partial of the Christian life.

But it's all tied in together. And we've got to be honest in this. And really what Jesus is saying is that being a Christian requires total commitment.

We can't be a bit of a Christian. We can't be a kind of a part-time Christian. Because at the end of the day, a person is either saved or they're not.

There's no in-between. because although a person may live out their days in this world, and some people may not be altogether sure, and they say, well, sometimes I think he's a Christian, but sometimes I'm not so sure.

Let me say, every person must make sure that they're a Christian. And at the end of the day, what I would say is, you make sure that you're a Christian.

[28 : 02] Stop looking to other people. We're awful for doing that. At the end of the day, remember the man who said to Jesus, he said, are there many that be saved? And do you remember what Jesus said?

You strive to enter in at the straight gate. I love Jesus' response. This man was going to enter into a big theological discussion with Jesus. He was asking about, are there going to be many saved? And Jesus said, you make sure. And Jesus is still the same. You know, we're all, we're very good at, I wonder about this. Don't know if this person is going in the right direction.

Don't know if this person, Jesus, I would imagine if we are thinking like that today, that Jesus will come with one word to us and he'll say, you make sure that you are right with me.

That person that you're thinking about there, that person will have to deal with it himself or herself personally. You make sure. it's like Jesus said to Peter on the shores of Galilee, remember after he had been restored.

[29 : 05] And John comes along and Jesus says, oh, what about him? Peter said to, Jesus said to Peter, what is that to you?

You follow me. In other words, Jesus is saying, I've, to Peter, I've just been speaking to you, Peter. I have been dealing with you. And straight away, the moment I finished you're right on, what about John?

John is not your concern in these things. You follow me. And that is so important for us to take on board.

And that's what we really find here. That's what Jesus is saying. And whoever will save his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

And Jesus is warning against being ashamed of Christ. You know, there is, as we live out in this world, there is a shame attached to the gospel.

[30 : 09] Sin causes shame. Without sin there will be no shame. And part of the distortion of life is that and this is where sin is so perverted.

So, this is where you find sin in its ultimate twistedness and perversion. It's where we are actually ashamed of the God who made us.

Isn't that the most illogical thing in the whole wide world? God who made us and filled our life with so many good things, the God who gave his only begotten son, to be our savior, and we're ashamed of him?

We're ashamed to be seen with a Bible? We're ashamed to be seen praying to God? Is that not the most illogical thing in the world?

And does that not show just how twisted and perverse sin is, causing us to be ashamed of the God who is only doing good to us? My dear friend, pray to be kept from being ashamed of Christ.

[31 : 29] Paul said, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Why? Because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. Isn't that a wonderful thing? No wonder he's not ashamed.

So let us make clear. To be ashamed is to deny a link. Peter is an example of somebody who is ashamed. To be ashamed is where you're denying a link to Jesus.

Are you a Christian? No. That's really what Peter was saying. They said to him, Peter, you're with that man? No, don't know him. None do with me.

Peter at that moment was ashamed. he was ashamed to be identified with Jesus. It was risky times. And when Peter got a sight of Jesus again, and Jesus looked upon Peter, Peter realized what he had done.

Oh, Peter was then ashamed at a different level. It was a shame that broke his heart because of what he had done to Jesus. And Peter at that point was on the right track.

[32 : 39] So, Jesus is warning against being ashamed of him. And Jesus highlights that there's only one way in which we ought to be saved, and can be saved, is to lose ourselves in him.

Ah, well, my friend, the most awful thing that could ever happen to us is to lose our soul. And I believe that by being in here today, you do not want that to happen.

I don't believe that there's anybody who's coming to church, whether it be here or anywhere, and who's coming under the gospel and picking up God's word and reading it, who is saying, I want to lose my soul.

I don't think so. I don't think they would be coming to church. I believe that by coming to church, you're saying, I have an interest in my soul, and I want my soul to be safe in Jesus.

Well, go further. Go as we said to the Jesus we spoke of in verse 11, who welcomed everyone.

[33 : 53] Today, if you come to him, he will welcome you. Let us pray. Lord, we pray to bless us as we've come under the word.

God, we pray that we may have heard it to the benefit of our souls. May we remember that we are worshipping the God of the impossible, the God of the possible, the God who is able to do, and the God who continues to do wonderful things.

Bless each one of us, we pray. Bless us as a home, bless us in our family. Bless all who are in need today. We pray for those who have experienced loss and bereavement and their hearts are sore.

We pray, Lord, for those who are struggling with the difficulties of life. We pray to encourage them and bless them. And we pray then to be with us, taking us all home safely.

Part us with thy blessing. Forgive us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.