**The Gospel of Luke**

**Witness to the Gentiles - #23**

**Luke 9:7-9, 10:17, 18-21**

**Jesus the Puzzle, Feeds 5,000, Peter’s Confession**

**Luke 9:7-9 - Herod Perplexed**

***7****Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening; and he was puzzled by what some people were saying, that John had risen from the dead,* ***8****and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen again.* ***9****Herod said, “I myself had John beheaded; but who is this man about whom I hear such things?” And he kept trying to see Him.*

**Notes and Studies**

1. Herod was the governor of Galilee, and the ministry of Jesus caused rumors. These kinds of talks about Jesus puzzled the governor. Three names were suggested;
2. John the Baptist
3. Elijah had appeared
4. One of the prophets of old

2. But none of these fit in the real person “Jesus.” There was and still is a Jewish expectation of the return of Elijah that was prophesied by the prophet Malachi:

*Malachi 4:5-6 - See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.*

3. To this day, Jewish [Seders](http://www.gotquestions.org/Jewish-festivals.html) (Passover Meal) include an empty chair at the table in anticipation that Elijah will return to herald the Messiah in fulfillment of Malachi’s word. After the conclusion of the Seder’s Grace After Meals, there is a universally accepted custom to pour a cup of wine, the “Cup of Elijah,” open the front door of the home, and recite several verses (mostly from Psalms), and at this moment homes are graced by the presence of Elijah the prophet.

4. When opening the door to invite in the prophet Elijah, for he is the one who visits the circumcision ceremony of every Jewish child, and testifies that the Jewish people are scrupulous regarding the “mitzvah of circumcision,” or the “meaning of the practice of circumcision.” Males were permitted to partake of the paschal offering only if they were circumcised. Thus, Elijah comes to the Seder to “testify” that all present are indeed circumcised and are keeping the Law.

5. According to the Jewish Tradition, on the night prior to the Exodus, the Seder night, the entire Jewish male population circumcised themselves—in order to be eligible to eat from the paschal lamb.

6. The “cup of Elijah” is the 5th cup, but before this cup there are four cups of wine drunk in the Passover Meal correspond to the four “promises of redemption” promised by God:

(1) “I will *take* you out from the suffering of Egypt,

(2) and I will *deliver* you from their bondage;

(3) I will *redeem* you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

(4) I will *take* you to myself as a nation.”

The fifth cup corresponds to the fifth expression of redemption, which comes in the following verse:

(5) “I will *bring* you to the Land”

This promise, however, is a reference to the future Messianic redemption, which will be announced by Elijah.

7. In Luke 8:20 Herod wanted to see Jesus and to see him preforming a miracle. Jesus did not concede, for Jesus came to preach the kingdom not to make a show of his power.

8. What are the reasons for the puzzle?

a. The unusual person Jesus who heals.

b. But at the same time does not follow the common religious life.

c. Jesus speaks of the kingdom and promise the kingdom to those who follow him, but pays no attention to the Law.

**Luke 9:10-17 - The Feeding of the Five Thousand**

***10****When the apostles returned, they gave an account to him of all that they had done. He took them along with Him. He withdrew by privately to a city called Bethsaida.* ***11****But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing.*

***12****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 deserted place.”*

***13****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.”* ***14****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.”* ***15****They did so, and had them all sit down.* ***16****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.* ***17****And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.*

**Notes and Studies**

1. Only Luke identifies the place (compare Mark 6:30-32; Matthew 4:13, John 6:1 no town is mentioned). The name ***beth saida***, or house of fishing, is East of the River Jordan. It seems to be the town from which Philip, Peter and Andrew came, according to (John 1:44; 12:21)
2. “The day was ending” is an indirect reference to the beginning of the Sabbath. They needed to get some food before the Sabbath begins at sunset. They can seek also seek lodging in the nearby villages. But the number was certainly great.
3. Jesus asks the apostles to give then food. In the OT, 2 Kings 4:42-44,

*Now a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, “Give them to the people that they may eat.”*

His servant said, *“What, will I set this before a hundred men?”* But he said, *“Give them to the people that they may eat, for thus says the Lord, “they shall eat and have some left over.”*  So he set *it* before them, and they ate and had *some* left over, according to the word of the Lord.

1. Five loaves and two fishes, the fish became an important symbol for the Christian faith from an early date. The word ***ichthys*** or ichthus from the [Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koine_Greek) ***ἰχθύς***, "[fish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fish)," is a [symbol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbol) consisting of two intersecting arcs, the ends of the right side extending beyond the meeting point so as to resemble the profile of a fish. It was used by [early Christians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Christians) as a secret [Christian symbol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_symbolism) and is now known colloquially as the "sign of the fish." ***ΙΧΘΥΣ*** (Ichthus) is for ***"Ίησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ"*** (Iēsous Christos, Theou Yios, Sōtēr), which translates into English as "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior".

**The Significance of the Feeding**

1. What is the meaning of the expression "Send them away”? The disciples knew not what Jesus had in mind, so speaking as though they were themselves at all annoyed, they considered that the time is not proper. And multitudes is great in number.
2. Jesus commanded them to supply them with food. This however, was impossible in the eyes of the disciples, for they had brought nothing with them but five loaves and two fishes.
3. John mentioned ***opsarion***, that is, dried fish (6:9).

1. Jesus used four actions: looking up to heaven, blessed them, broke and gave.
2. Jesus points to heaven from where come all blessings; He points to the Father who fills all things by his mercy.
3. We may learn that when we meet for a meal, and are about to break bread; it is our confession of receiving God’s mercy when we stretched our hands, and call upon Him to bless.
4. But what was the result of the miracle? It satisfied a large multitude with food, for there were as many as five thousand men besides women and children. The miracle didn’t end here; there were also gathered twelve baskets of fragments. What do we infer from this? A plain assurance that hospitality receives a rich recompense from God. The disciples offered five loaves: but after the large multitude had been satisfied, there was gathered for each one of them a basketful of fragments.
5. It is a lesson for being will to receive strangers, *"For he that sow blessings shall also reap blessings,"* according to Paul's words.
6. God in the OT *"… rained manna in the desert upon the Israelites; He gave them bread from heaven; man did eat angels' food,"* according to the words of the Psalm. But now in the desert Jesus has abundantly supplied those in need of food, bringing it down, as it were, from heaven.

**Christ the Food of the whole world**

The Feeding takes a turning point in John 6: 22-40, where Jesus offers Himself as the bread of life to those who believe in Him: for Jesus came down from heaven, and gave life to the world, the five actions point to the Lord’s Supper especially, “breaking the bread.” But the discourse was not recorded in Luke but in John chapter 6.

**Luke 9:18-21 - Peter’s Confession**

***18****And it happened that while Jesus was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, “Who do the crowds say that I am?”* ***18****They replied and said, “John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again.”* ***20****Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter spoke in reply and said, “You are God’s Messiah”* ***21****But he warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone.*

**Notes and Studies**

1. Jesus had been identified as the “Messiah” before in the infancy narrative (Luke 2:11), but that was the handing over of the faith of the church to the reader of the Gospel. Luke himself comments on what was happing and writes the same confession in 4:41. Here in Luke 9:21, Jesus reacted to Peter’s confession and prohibited him and certainly the others to use this “title.” This prohibition came after “feeding the multitude.” We can understand the reason clearly from John 6 for the multitude follows Jesus to eat free bread and to enjoy the power of the Messiah.
2. Jesus did not impose the same prohibition on the demon in Luke 8:28 for there was a conflict between “good and evil” and liberation must take place and the manifestation of the power of Jesus seems to be part of ministry of Jesus, while here, it is what the title will do to the “crowd” who were fed and can continue coming for food.
3. This confession comes after a question, “What do others say?” But the essential part is, “What do you say?”
4. Our faith does not depend on what others say, because it has to be personal confession, but why?

a. Personal recognition not driven by any kind of “group pressure.”

b. Confession based on experience that we own.

5. Confessing Jesus as Lord. Whether this is from the Holy Spirit according to the Apostolic Faith or whether this is from our customs, education and solidarity with other Christians, how do we identify our confession? That’s the subject of the following seventh century writing of Abbot Sophronius.

**Letters of Abbot Sophronius to Fr. Zephaniah**

Sophronius, the servant of Jesus Christ, to all the brothers who are the guidance of Fr. Zephaniah, peace and love to all of you.

Concerning your question, whether we confess the divinity of our Lord as just a habit or is it from the Holy Spirit?

1. Let us discern whether our confession is by the power and the grace of the Holy Spirit, or whether we have learned it from others and it is due to the common hope we share with them.

2. Confessing Jesus as Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit is always accompanied by fervent love, longing to obey the Lord whom we confess and a desire to do his commandments. Confessing Jesus as Lord as a result of education, customs and sharing the life of a community remains as a seed in the mind, which may stir our minds and inspire us to study and learn even more to create an opportunity for a debate or to have something to say to others. And if this seed reaches the inner life (heart) and receives the gift of life from the Spirit of the Lord it becomes the foundation for a new life. In other words it should not be neglected but should be watered to make it grow up. Learning and studying the word of God can capture the heart, increase our love for the Lord and purify our life. This must not be neglected.

*Briefly: Confessing the Lord by the Holy Spirit always moves us within the circle of the divine fire of love, but confessing the Lord as a result of being led by others or of our education, social customs or habits, remains as seeking to behave and conduct our life according to what we know. This is limited to the rational and the social life. The difference between the two will always lie in the difference between the fire of true love, which comes from the Holy Spirit, and the ordinary life of those who seek to be part of a community and share its social life.*

3. Confessing Jesus as Lord by the Holy Spirit appears as a fire, which consumes our suffering or sustains us through it. When one confesses Christ it is not simply a testimony. It is the power of life, which sustains and fortifies the soul. Thus we do not compromise in spite of the severity of our pain, or give up in spite of whatever difficulties we encounter. On the other hand the confession which springs from education alone may seem a bad idea if circumstances are not good and we may abandon it for a while and come back to it when the problems become less. We can see the difference between social customs and the grace of the Holy Spirit in times of difficulties. What comes from customs is abandoned, but what comes from the Spirit of the Lord remains in our heart.

*Briefly: Confessing the Lord by the Holy Spirit gains more ground in times of pain and temptation, while what comes from education alone is treated like all other ideas.*

4. When there is doubt and we can see sadness and pain because of the blowing of the storms of doubt, we can be sure that this sadness comes from the Holy Spirit who is not just giving us a warning, but is sharing with us part of his painful groaning, which cannot be expressed. The Holy Spirit, the fire of divine love, moves us always in our weakness, desiring to help us and to keep us in the fellowship of Christ and the Father. But if there is no sadness or pain in the heart and there is joy in doubt and a desire to abandon faith, be careful, because your faith has come to you as part of your social upbringing and needs the living water of the Holy Spirit to grow.

5. Confessing Jesus as Lord by the Holy Spirit remains always a source of hope and a sure sign of eternal life. This can be seen when we refuse money, power, possessions or a higher social status in order to remain disciples of Jesus.

*Briefly: This confession is founded up on the Cross of Jesus and his resurrection. It takes self-sacrifice from the Cross and hope in new life from his resurrection. But the confession, which comes from social custom, remains like all our ideas, moving in every direction according to circumstances.*

6. Confessing Jesus as Lord by the Holy Spirit in prayer is the cornerstone of our personal prayers. It cannot be abandoned at all. It is because of Jesus that we can come to the Father and enter into his presence. But if we learn about the Lord with our mind alone, this knowledge does not lead us to pray or discover the Lord in prayer and we pray only if we join friends or if we are in trouble or need the Lord's help.

*Briefly: What comes from the Spirit is always life or a cause for life, and life is not life without love. What comes from customs depends on circumstances till the Spirit of the Lord draws us to himself and truly becomes our true and only Master.*

Pray for me, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

*Translated from Coptic by GHB*