

# Beheld in the Breaking

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>7</sup> Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, <sup>8</sup> by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. <sup>9</sup> Herod said, “John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?” And he sought to see him.

<sup>10</sup> On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. <sup>11</sup> When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing. <sup>12</sup> Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, “Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place.” <sup>13</sup> But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” <sup>14</sup> For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” <sup>15</sup> And they did so, and had them all sit down. <sup>16</sup> And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. <sup>17</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

<sup>18</sup> Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” <sup>19</sup> And they answered, “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” (Luke 9:7–20)

### Missiology and Christology

- A. You might recall, last time we dealt with this text, I began by pointing out that this miracle—the feeding of the 5000—is in fact the only miracle of Jesus, apart from His resurrection, that is recorded in all four gospels.
  1. Now that ought to give us reason to pause. The clear implication, it seems to me, is that the Holy Spirit and the early church saw this moment in Jesus’ ministry as profoundly significant.
    - a. Last time I brought out some of this significance with regard to missiology—the mission and ministry of the church.
    - b. This time I said we’d look at this event’s significance with regard to Christology—the person and work of Jesus. It would seem, from the way Luke frames this story that there is something particularly revelatory about this meal in the wilderness—something that provides breakthrough concerning Jesus’ identity.

## A Building Tension

- A. Before I show you this in our text, let me remind you that, for chapters now people have been trying to figure out just who Jesus is.
1. So as Jesus begins His public ministry, He preaches in the synagogue there in Nazareth, and the crowds respond with wonder, amazement, and confusion: [“Is not this Joseph’s son?” \(Luke 4:22\)](#).
  2. And when Jesus declares the paralytic’s sins forgiven, we read that [“the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, ‘Who is this who speaks blasphemies?’” \(Luke 5:21\)](#).
  3. Even John the Baptist is wrestling with it. From prison he sends a couple of his own disciples to Jesus to ask the question: [“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” \(Luke 7:19\)](#).
  4. When Jesus forgives the sins of a prostitute who approaches Him at dinner, we read that [“those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this, who even forgives sins?’” \(Luke 7:49\)](#).
  5. When Jesus is out on the Sea of Galilee with His disciples and He calms the whirlwind with a word, we read that: [“\[The disciples\] were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, ‘Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?’” \(Luke 8:25\)](#).
- B. There is no more important question in all the world that could be asked. And all along the way, we are meant, I think, as we move through Luke’s gospel, to wrestle with this question ourselves.

## A Tipping Point

- A. But as we read on in Luke, the questions continue, the tension builds, and it carries into [vv. 7-9](#) of our text, where now news of Jesus has reached the palace and even Herod the tetrarch is perplexed: [“Who is this about whom I hear such things?” \(v. 9\)](#). Even the king is forced to deal with the matter of Jesus’ identity.
- B. Here is where we start to see the various options people have been throwing out. Three ideas are put forward in particular:
1. Maybe He’s John the Baptist risen from the dead.
  2. Maybe He’s Elijah—whom we know from the OT never died. He was taken up into heaven. And [Mal 4:5-6](#) says that Israel should expect to see him again in some way before the arrival of God and the end of days.
  3. Maybe He’s a prophet like one of those from of old. Moses, back in [Deut 18](#), just before he died, left this prophetic promise with Israel: [“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you” \(v. 15; cf. v. 18\)](#). Some people in Israel, it seems, were saying: “Maybe Jesus is the one!”
- C. So the tension concerning Jesus’ identity is building. “Who is He?” The crowds are asking, the disciples are asking, Herod is asking. And then in [vv. 18-20](#) the matter reaches a tipping point. For here now we see that even Jesus Himself is asking. And it’s in this context, that the answer is finally supplied!

1. Speaking to His disciples, He asks: “Who do the crowds say that I am?” (v. 18). Those same three options surface again. But then He presses in a bit harder: “[Okay . . .] But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, ‘The Christ of God’” (v. 20).
  - a. Now, to be clear: Jesus has already been identified as the Christ by the angels (Luke 2:11) and by the demons (Luke 4:41). But this is the first time such a confession is taken on human lips. That’s a big deal!
- D. So Herod’s confusion back in vv. 7-9—“Who is this about whom I hear such things?” (v. 9)—gives way to Peter’s confession now in vv. 18-20—“[You are] the Christ of God” (v. 20).
  1. And now, don’t miss this, situated in between the confusion and the confession is the feeding of the 5000 (vv. 10-17).
- E. Implication: There’s revelation in this miracle. Jesus’ identity is clarified by way of this meal in the wilderness. It unveils something to us of who He is and what He’s come to do. It’s the feeding of the 5000 that seems to have tipped the scales from confusion to confession. Jesus is beheld in the breaking of bread.
  1. And I want to know: How?! How did this work? What did they see? Because I want us to see it too. I want us to join Peter in this confession: “[You are] the Christ of God.”
- F. I’m going to organize my thoughts under three headings: (1) Jesus is the New and Greater; (2) Jesus is the Christ of God; and (3) Jesus is Going to Die . . . and Rise.

## (1) Jesus Is the New and Greater

### The New

- A. You remember that some of the people around Jesus are wondering maybe He is some sort of a new Moses, or maybe He’s some sort of a new Elijah. Well, it turns out they’re not all that far off.
  1. This miraculous meal here in our text actually has striking parallels with two meals that came hundreds of years before in the OT—one during the time of Moses; and one within the Elijah-Elisha narrative back in 1-2 Kings.
- B. The connection with Moses, I think, is relatively well known. Many are familiar with the Exodus story—how God brought Israel out from slavery in Egypt and then led them by way of the wilderness to the land Canaan. And in the wilderness, Exodus 16, people are getting hungry, people are grumbling against Moses and against the Lord. And how does the Lord respond? “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day . . .’” (v. 4a). And He did this for them for forty years—for the entirety of their wilderness sojourn (v. 35).
  1. So, yes—as Jesus welcomes this hungry crowd in the wilderness, looks up to heaven, breaks, and distributes bread miraculously until all are satisfied—God is marking Him out as something of a new Moses here, come to redeem His people by way of a new Exodus.

- C. But there's more. We fast forward now to a chaotic and tragic period in Israel's history. After the establishment of the monarchy, in the midst of the ups-and-downs, God raises up the prophet Elijah to call His people back to covenant faithfulness. And we're told that the "spirit of Elijah" is given to Elisha (2 Kings 2:15) who carries on the work. And, in 2 Kings 4, there's a famine in the land, and we read of a man who comes to Elisha with twenty loaves of barley. And (v. 42bff.) "42b Elisha said, 'Give to the men, that they may eat.' 43 But his servant said, 'How can I set this before a hundred men?' So he repeated, 'Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the Lord, "They shall eat and have some left.'" 44 So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the Lord."
1. Now again, parallels abound here with our text back in Luke 9. They are in a desolate place, insufficient bread is taken up, there's pushback from the disciples, and yet all eat their full, and they even come out of the whole thing with leftovers.
    - a. So God is marking off Jesus as a sort of new Elijah. The crowds are not all that far off here.

## And Greater

- A. But now, though these parallels are clear and conspicuous even to the passive observer, the essential meaning here is actually found in what I might call the perpendiculars—the places where the stories differ.
1. Sure Jesus is like a new Moses and Elijah here—standing in the gap for God's people. But He is not just new, He is also greater.
    - a. With Moses, the manna was just enough for that day. We're told in Exo 16:18 that there was never any leftovers. But with Jesus in Luke 9 they end the day with 12 baskets full (v.17).
      - i. It seems God is hinting here at the fact that, in Jesus, there is this perpetual feast, this abounding, never-ending provision, even, celebration. There's not just enough for the day, it's grace spilling over.
    - b. With Elisha, sure we're told that they ate and had some left, but in this story they start with 20 loaves and feed 100 men. Jesus in Luke 9 takes 5 loaves and feeds 5000 men.
- B. You see, again, Jesus is not just a new Moses or a new Elijah, He is a greater Moses, a greater Elijah.
1. God is not just replaying past events in Jesus. No! These past events were God's way of preparing His people, of wetting their appetite, of setting their eyes to the horizon in wait for an even more significant and climactic event: the arrival of His Son, the Christ—the One who would accomplish not just a momentary redemption but, as the author of Hebrews puts it: an "eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12).

C. That's why, just a few verses later in [Luke 9](#), Jesus will take three with Him up the mountain and be transfigured—displayed in dazzling glory. Moses and Elijah appear and are talking with Him, and then God thunders from the glory cloud: “<sup>35b</sup> ‘This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!’ <sup>36</sup> And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone” (vv. 35b–36).

1. Moses and Elijah are there, and then suddenly it's just Jesus alone, as if to say: “He is not merely a new Moses or Elijah, He is the One Moses and Elijah were pointing to all along. He is my Son, my Chosen One . . . He is the Christ of God.”

## (2) Jesus Is the Christ of God

A. Peter, it seems, has come to understand something of this.

1. As he watched Jesus welcome and heal any who had need; as he watched Jesus break and distribute the bread and fish; as He watched the crowds eat to the point of satisfaction; as he contemplated the meaning of 12 baskets left over, perhaps God brought to his mind that prophecy from Isaiah that speaks of what's known as the Messianic Banquet—the feast, the party, that the Messiah, the Christ, will host at the end of the age: “<sup>6</sup> On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. <sup>7</sup> And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. <sup>8</sup> He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. <sup>9</sup> It will be said on that day, ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation’” (Isa 25:6–9).

- a. Doesn't that sound amazing? The richest foods, the best wine, death swallowed up forever, no more tears, no more shame. You've never seen a party like this!

B. And Peter's saying, “Man, I think something like that is what's being hinted at here in the wilderness. You are not just a new Moses or Elijah, you are ‘the Christ of God.’”

1. To which Jesus responds: “Yes! But let me fill that title out for you a bit. You're right. I'm bringing in the banquet of God, I'm going to make room for you around the table, I'm going to overcome your enemies, I'm even going to swallow up death forever, but I'm not going to do it in the way you're expecting. I'm going to swallow up death by letting death swallow up Me.”
  - a. That's why, if we keep reading, after Peter's confession we see that Jesus immediately pushes back on Him there in [v. 22](#): “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.”

## (3) Jesus Is Going to Die . . . and Rise

## To Die

- A. Peter beheld much in the breaking of bread there in the wilderness, but He didn't behold this. So what does Jesus do? He breaks bread with His disciples again.
- B. Interestingly, John tells us that the feeding of the 5000 took place during the Passover ([John 6:4](#)). Well, exactly one year has passed, and it's the time of Passover once more. And Jesus is gathered yet again to eat with His disciples, this time in Jerusalem, this time on the very eve of His death.
  - 1. And just as Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples there in the wilderness, so too now He does the exact same things with His disciples around the table: ["He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, \[and now He fills out the meaning of this broken bread for them\] saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me'" \(22:19\).](#)
    - a. "I am the bread! I am the bread—broken, killed, so that the world might live. If sinners are going to be brought into the kingdom of my Father, someone's got to pay for that sin . . . and here I am!"

## And Rise

- A. And so, again, we behold more of Christ in the breaking of bread. But even still, there's more that needs to be revealed, or at least received.
  - 1. Even though Jesus kept telling these guys: "I'm going to die, but I'm going to rise . . . I'm going to die, but I'm going to rise . . . I'm going to die, but I'm going to rise" . . . they didn't get it. It's a stubborn darkness in us.
- B. Judas rolls in to Gethsemane with the mob. They put Him on trial, falsely accuse, condemn, and ultimately crucify Jesus. And every one of His disciples thinks it's over.
  - 1. But it's just beginning, right? Jesus rises from the dead, our ransom's paid in full, fellowship with God can now be fully restored. But Jesus' disciples are still in mourning. They're still dressed in black.
- C. In [Luke 24](#) we read that two of them were on the road headed towards a village named Emmaus and they're just depressed. And Jesus shows up alongside them. And they don't recognize Him. They're like: "Man, why are you smiling? Didn't you hear? All our hopes have been crushed. They just crucified Jesus three days ago. We thought He was the Christ."
- D. So what's Jesus going to do to reveal Himself as risen to them? He breaks bread with them once more: ["30 When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. 31a And their eyes were opened . . . 33 And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together . . . 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" \(Luke 24:30-31a, 33, 35\).](#)

# Conclusion

## Beheld in the Breaking

### A. So . . .

1. The broken bread of Moses and Elisha help us long for and anticipate the Christ.
2. The broken bread set before the 5000 in the wilderness helps us identify the Christ.
3. The broken bread around the table of the Last Supper helps us understand the sacrificial death of the Christ.
4. The broken bread on the road to Emmaus helps us discern the triumph and resurrection of the Christ.
5. And all of this prepares us for the heavenly banquet of the Christ where, at last, we will see Him, not in a mirror dimly, but face to face.

### B. He is beheld in the breaking . . . of bread.

1. Which is why the early church, we read in [Acts 2:42](#): “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, [and] to the breaking of bread . . .” Which I take to be a reference to the Lord’s Supper. They devoted themselves to it because God reveals Himself in it again and again and again.

## He Gave Us a Meal

### A. So we did all this work for one application point: the Lord’s Supper—the breaking of bread, this meal symbolizing His death for our life—really matters. God uses it to reveal Himself to us.

1. N.T. Wright puts it like this: “When [Jesus] wanted fully to explain what his forthcoming death was all about, he didn’t give a theory. He didn’t even give them a set of scriptural texts. He gave them a meal.”

### B. Why a meal? Because sometimes it’s not enough just to hear that God loves you. You need to see it. The Lord’s Supper is gospel show and tell. It is a sermon for all of our senses. It is the love of God coming at us in a way we can see, touch, taste, experience.

### C. Think about what this table, this meal, communicates:

1. [Forgiven:] As the unleavened bread is broken, are you not reminded that the sinless One was broken on that cross for you. He has paid your ransom in full!
2. [Welcomed:] And as you walk towards the table to partake are we not made freshly aware that He welcomes you—that in spite of what you have done, because of what He has done, you belong around this table with Him. There’s no guilt, there’s no shame here.
3. [Reconciled:] And as you return to your seat with bread and cup in hand, perhaps you sit back down next to your spouse. Last night’s fight, with all its jagged edges, is suddenly thrust into the light of the cross. You see a God who gives Himself for you. And you are renewed in your resolve to forgive, reconcile, and love.

4. [Sustained:] And as we eat and drink, are we not given tangible experience of gospel realities—that God will provide for our needs, that His grace can sustain and satisfy, that we live because He died.
  5. [Kept:] And as we bow our head in prayer, or lift up our hands in thanksgiving, we are reminded once more of the words of our Savior, how He said on that night that He will eat again with us in the kingdom of God (cf. [Luke 22:16](#)) at what we know from [Rev 19](#) is the wedding supper of the Lamb. We remember that this meal not only looks back to Christ's first coming it looks forward in full anticipation of His return. He will keep us to the end.
- D. All of this and so much more is beheld in the breaking. This meal, in many ways, is God's remedy for the stubbornness in us. This is the way He keeps His Christ always before us. This is the way we are kept beholding and kept confessing. May God reveal Himself to us as we partake even today!