

## The Test of the Unsolvable Problem

Tests of God #6

Luke 9:12-17

*When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

In our homes, there are pipes. In our homes, those pipes apparently have brains. They know not to drip in the morning, afternoon, or evening. Instead, they instinctively know to drip in the middle of the night while we are sleeping because their sole desire is to wake us up. We can't fix the drip, so we call a plumber. The plumber can't fix the drip, so we pray to the Lord for divine intervention because the problem from our perspective is unsolvable. In our lives, there are pipes. They were designed to carry water – living water – to every corridor of our homestead. But instead of doing what they were designed to do, they drip, drip, and drip. They drip in our families. They drip in our physical well-being. They drip in our churches. They drip in our businesses. They drip in our nation. And they drip in our world. We can't fix those drips, so we enlist those we think can. When they can't, we pray to the Lord for divine intervention because the problem from our perspective is unsolvable.

Friends, I want to tell you today that when the drip still doesn't want to cooperate after you tried six ways to Sunday to fix it, that is a sign that another test of God is going on in your life. It's the Test of the Unsolvable Problem. We've all taken that test. It's a test that involves a problem or issue that you have tried and tried to solve in your own strength, power, and understanding but cannot. It's the test Abraham took when God promised him a child in his old age and knew that wife was barren. It's the test the widow of Zarephath took when she had no oil for her lamp and no flour for bread. It's the test Naaman the Syrian took when he was diagnosed with leprosy. And it's the test the disciples took when Jesus – whose very presence makes the unsolvable solvable – instructed them to feed the multitudes with only a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread.

You see, people of God, the reason God gives us the Test of the Unsolvable Problem is because we are professionals highly skilled in the art of misdiagnosis. We often like to tell Jesus what he should do about an issue that he doesn't see as an issue. "Lord, send the crowd away so they can find food and lodging because we are in a remote place here." We are also professionals highly skilled in the art of unbelief in the miraculous. "Lord, you want us to feed these people here in this remote place with only five loaves and two fish?" "Uhm, excuse me guys, have you forgotten who you are talking to? We are also skilled at minimizing present blessings. "And Jesus looked up to heaven and gave thanks for the five loaves and the two fish." Finally, we spend so much time trying to solve what looks to be an unsolvable problem that we miss Jesus in our midst. We see the Test of the Unsolvable Problem in action in Luke 9:12-17. Turn there with me.

*<sup>12</sup> Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here." <sup>13</sup> He replied, "You give them something to eat." They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd."<sup>14</sup> (About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each."<sup>15</sup> The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. <sup>16</sup> Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people.<sup>17</sup> They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.*

### Reasons God Gives You the Test of the Unsolvable Problem

#### 1. Misdiagnosis (12)

- **WebMD:** (1) The most dangerous website for hypochondriacs on the internet is WebMD. (2) I've diagnosed myself with Proteus Syndrome for a swollen knuckle and Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease when I can't remember something. (3) Sometimes the unsolvable problem you think you face isn't the real unsolvable problem. (4) And God gives you the test because He's the only who knows the difference between the two.
- **How They Misdiagnosed:** (1) Gave Jesus Instructions: Notice the command in v12 that comes straight from the mouth of the disciples: "Send the crowd away." (2) Incorrectly assumed they couldn't find food and rest where they were: The disciples had just witnessed Jesus raise a widow's son back to life, calm a storm on the Sea of Galilee, raise a dead girl back to life, and heal a woman who bled for 12 years in chs. 7-8. But instead of seeing Jesus for who he is – capable of miracles – they were giving orders. (3) Incorrectly assumed remote places were barren and devoid of God's miraculous intervention: They forgotten Bible stories like manna from heaven in the wilderness and John the Baptist baptizing in the wilderness. As a result, they barked a command to Jesus instead of being silent to see what he would do next. Misdiagnosis was the result.
- **Why They Misdiagnosed:** Luke tells us in 9:1 that just before this episode, Jesus sent the 12 out and gave them authority to drive out demons and cure diseases. They had just returned from a successful endeavor. They confused "some" authority with "all" authority and thought they were now in a position to tell Jesus what to do because of it. They were wrong.
- **App:** We share in the disciple's story, don't we? We bark commands at him and inform him of a problem that's not really the problem – only a symptom. And our misdiagnosis is usually brought on when we come down from the mountain and act as if we have all authority. When the truth is the only authority, we ever had in the past is what Jesus gave to us. And the problem remains unsolved.

## 2. Unbelief in the Miraculous (13-14a)

- **CS Lewis** — (1) “Miracles are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see.” (2) One of the greatest reasons God makes us face an unsolvable problem is because his letters are too large for some of us to see also. We know he’s in the business of the miraculous. We just don’t believe it.
- **The Test in the Command:** The issue wasn’t that the crowd needed food and shelter. The issue was they didn’t believe Jesus could provide it. That’s what Jesus is up to in this whole passage. As a result, he now gives them a command that demonstrates this: “You give them something to eat. On the surface, it’s impossible to carry out. Jesus knows this full well.
- **The Unbelief in the Response:** “We only have 5 loaves and 2 fish unless we go and buy food.” Why did they respond this way? (a) They were in a barren place — That’s why they command Jesus to send them back to the countryside and villages. (b) They don’t have enough food — only five loaves of bread and two fish. We know from the other Gospels that this is Philip. He’s taking the cash register approach: the bill is this much. We only have this much. And they gave this response to the One that had seen perform numerous miracles. (c) The crowd is too large: Luke tells us about 5,000 men were there. The average family size in those days’ ways between 4 and 5. That’s at a minimum 20,000 people.
- **A Most Important Lesson:** Jesus had to get them to see the problem was completely unsolvable in order to force them to depend on Jesus, the author of miracles.
- **App:** There are always two ways to see unsolvable problems: through the flesh or the spirit. The flesh scoffs at Sarah having a child in her old age. But the spirit believes and God credits that as righteousness. The flesh says: “we only have 5 loaves and 2 fish.” We can’t do it. But the spirit says: “Good bread. Good meat. Good Lord, let’s eat.” For nothing is impossible with Jesus. He’s in the business of turning the unsolvable into baskets of leftovers. That’s who He is. The disciples needed to learn that. We do too. Thus, the reason for the test.

## 3. Minimizing Present Blessings (14b-16)

- **Kid’s Prayers** — (1) We have an instinct from birth to minimize the present blessings in search of a different. (2) I ran across a child’s prayer this week that demonstrates this. It’s from Steven, age 7: “Dear God, thank you for my brand-new baby brother. But what I prayed for was a puppy.” (3) And this one from Diana, age 11: “Dear God. I love Christmas and Easter. But could you put another Holiday in the middle please? There’s nothing good in there now.” (4) Because of the disciple’s minimizing of the blessings of the fish and loaves, he made sure to teach them through his prayer what being thankful for present provisions sounds like before the Father.
- **Present Blessing #1: The Goodness of God:** (1) Something interesting happens in the second command Jesus gave to his disciples in this passage in v 14. He instructed the disciples to assemble the people — the masses — into groups of 50 and have them sit down. They could have eaten standing up. Both commands indicate that Jesus wanted them to enjoy the miraculous meal they were all about to receive. But he wanted them to take their time and feast in a smaller setting and see, rest, and enjoy the goodness of the meal of God they were about to receive.
- **Present Blessing #2: For What We Have in Our Hands:** (1) In v16 Luke comes back to the fish and bread. In v 13, the disciples say we “only” have 5 loaves and 2 fish. (2) But in v 16, Jesus takes the bread and fish and lifts them up to heaven and thanked God for them.
- **App:** What we have — what God has blessed us with — is enough to solve the unsolvable. But it requires something from you: lifting your bread and fish up to heaven and thank God for it. God always wants to see if we are thankful for what we have before he solves and unsolvable problem.

## 4. Missing Jesus in Our Midst (17)

- **Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior** — (1) Pass me not, O gentle Savior. Hear my humble cry. While on others Thou art calling, do not pass me by. (2) If you miss Jesus in your midst, your unsolvable problem remains unsolvable. But when you trust because he’s right there in your midst, the unsolvable problem turns into one of the greatest manifestations of His glory. Oh, pass us not, O gentle savior.
- **Jesus in Our Midst Always Provides:** v16 tells us that Jesus “gave” the provision to his disciples to distribute. He didn’t do it himself. He always involves us in the process.
- **Jesus in Our Midst Always Satisfied:** v17 tells us that everyone ate and was “satisfied.” The word used here in the language of the New Testament comes from a root that means “to smile.” That’s the image. They ate, sat back, and smiled, full from God’s intervention.
- **Jesus in Our Mist Always Does More Than We Can Think, Ask, or Imagine:** The final statement in v 17 informs us that there were 12 baskets of broken pieces left over. That’s important information: (1) At a basic level, they had leftovers. (2) But the number 12 is a number of divine government/covenants, And the 12 broken pieces indicates that the old covenant was about to be put on the shelf and the new covenant — with the 12 disciples — taking the place of the 12 tribes was about to be instituted. That would happen when Jesus rose from the grave, ascended to glory, and the disciples went into all the world as a kingdom of priests and holy nation to share the good news of the miraculous power of Christ.
- **App:** He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.” Glory be to God.