

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN6B_Jesus is the Bread of Life)

The Bread From Heaven (John 6:22-40)

The multitude that had been fed retired for the night after observing the disciples leave in the boat and Jesus retreat into the mountain. The next day they began to look for him around Bethsaida on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee in the vicinity of Jesus' miracle of the fishes and loaves. After they did not locate him, they went to Capernaum – Jesus' de facto headquarters for His Galilean ministry – most likely in hopes of at least locating His disciples since they knew that Jesus had not departed in the boat with His disciples. However, they were surprised to find Jesus there and it caused them to wonder how He got there. Jesus did not answer their question, but cut to the heart of the issue with them – why they were looking for Him in the first place. The miracle of walking on the water was a sign intended for Jesus' disciples only.

Jesus' reply – Jesus began His reply to the multitudes with the statement “most assuredly, I say to you” (NKJV) or “truly, truly, I say to you” (NASV). This phrase can be literally rendered – “Amen, Amen, I say to you.” This phrase is used 25 times in John's Gospel and always calls attention to important affirmations. It is not used in the Synoptic Gospels.¹ In this discourse, Jesus uses this phrase four times and it draws attention to His teaching.

In **verses 26 thru 27**, Jesus provides a summary of the problem and His response. Jesus rebukes them for their materialistic orientation and lack of spiritual perception. They sought Jesus simply for another meal rather than because the miracle pointed to a spiritual fact greater than any food that perishes. In **verse 27**, Jesus included a statement that probably eluded most, if not all, of the multitude. Jesus equates the food that endures to everlasting life with Himself. In addition, it is Jesus Who will give this food to them. In the remainder of the discourse, Jesus builds upon this statement.

The Multitude's Question – What are the works of God? The people recognized that Jesus was teaching something different – a different way of obtaining favor with God. However, their perception was that Jesus was teaching yet another system of works and if they could only do this new set of works, they could please God. Later, the apostle Paul comments on the works orientation of the Jews.

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Ro 10:2-4)

Jesus' Reply – Jesus simply states that the work of God is that they “believe in Him” Who was sent by the Father. No man can please God by his own works of righteousness.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God, not of works*, lest anyone should boast. (Eph 2:8-9)

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Tit 3:5)

¹ John F. Walvoord and Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983), 278.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro 6:23)

The People Respond – In **verses 30-31**, the people manifest their arrogance by asking Jesus what sign He would perform so that they could believe (cf. 1 Co 1:22 – “For the Jews request a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom”). They even implied that the manna provided to their fathers in the desert was a greater miracle than they had just experienced. They wanted empirical evidence in order to have faith, yet faith is “the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1b). If they would only believe, they would see the glory of God (Jn 11:40). One can easily detect their rationale – if Jesus was greater than Moses, Jesus should be able to do more than Moses. In their way of thinking, Jesus’ miracle was less significant than the manna because the manna fed the entire nation for 40 years. However, they overlooked the fact that the generation that benefited from the manna had rebelled against God and His appointed leader – Moses. The Exodus generation failed to believe God’s appointed leader in spite of the daily miracle. In like manner, Jesus’ generation was not believing the very Son of God in spite of a miracle. If the Exodus generation failed for 40 years, then it was a greater indictment against Jesus’ generation that they failed to believe even after having the Exodus generation as an example.

Jesus’ Reply – In **verses 32-33**, Jesus replies to the arrogant response of these unbelievers in which they long for miracles comparable to those performed during Moses’ day. In fact, they must have attributed the miracles to Moses Himself judging from Jesus’ response – “Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven” (v. 32). Jesus indicates that the bread of God is a man who comes down from heaven. Jesus repeats this assertion about Himself several times throughout this discourse in chapter 6, i.e. vv. 32-33, 38, 41-42, 50-51, and 58.

The Crowd’s Response – The crowd evidently missed the connection between Jesus and the Bread from heaven. Their thoughts were still on food for the physical body and not the spiritual realities of Jesus’ life, miracles and teaching. Their definition of a sign was for food to be provided perpetually. They wanted a Messiah that fit their needs and meet their requirements. They were not interested in making adjustments on their part to align with God’s model of a people who were ready to receive the kingdom (Matt 5:3-11).

Principle: Genuine humility is evidenced in one’s life by a willingness to adjust to God’s model of the spiritual man or woman.

Application: Do you have a pliable soul – one that is willing to make the adjustments necessary to align with God’s model? Or, are you more like the Jews of Jesus’ day who want to fit God into your model?

Application: Are there commands and exhortations in God’s Word that cause you to cringe or attempt to rationalize away? Or, do you view those commands and exhortations as challenges from God to orient your life to His model?

Application: Is your view of Christianity merely a model where Christianity is just another mechanism to assist you in your own self-advancement and self-promotion and where God is only seen as a means to an end? Or, is your view of Christianity consistent with God’s model?

Application: Where are you in the development and use of the components of the divine power sphere? If you have been struggling for years just to master component #1 – yieldedness – you may have never developed any of the other components² in your life which are so essential to demonstrating Christ – God’s model – to the world.

² The components of the divine power sphere are: 1) yieldedness; 2) humility; 3) objectivity; 4) momentum; 5) personal love for God; 6) impersonal or unconditional love for man;

Jesus' Reply – In **verses 35-40**, Jesus attempts to clarify the multitude's misunderstanding once and for all regarding this food (**v. 27**) or bread (**v. 33**) that is the basis of everlasting life. In **verse 27**, Jesus contrasts perishable food with food that provides everlasting life that He would give the people. In **verse 33**, Jesus defines the bread of life as "He Who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." The phrase "bread of life" means bread which provides life.³ It was a bread which gave life, not nourishment.

The Jew's focus was solely upon the physical, tangible things of this world that would relieve their suffering. They were unwilling to allow God to shift their paradigm of thinking. Their thinking was stuck in a rut – a rut of their own making, a rut that tried to fit God into their mold. Their response is similar to the Samaritan woman at the well who wanted to have perpetual water (4:15).

Jesus' "I am" statement in **verse 35** is the first in a series of seven "I am" statements He makes that are recorded in John's Gospel account. This statement would have had particular significance to a first century Jewish listener, especially in a situation where Jesus was being compared to Moses. When Moses had asked God His name so that Moses could tell the children of Israel God's name, God told Moses that His name was "I AM."

Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Ex 3:13-14)

Therefore, the words "I AM" when combined with Jesus' other statements that He had come down from heaven⁴ and had been sent by God the Father (cf. 27, 29, 33, 38) would have been tantamount to equating Jesus with God.

"He who comes to Me" (v. 36) emphasizes the first act of the soul in approaching Jesus – i.e. one's own volition. Positive volition toward God's revealed will is a prerequisite to salvation. Those who do approach Jesus with such positive volition "shall **never** hunger" and "shall **never** thirst." The word "never" is emphatic in the Greek (i.e. the use of the double negative *ou meō*). The phrase "he who believes in Me" is in the present tense in Greek and emphasizes the continuous relation of trust.

Even if Jesus had produced the miracles that the crowd desired and conformed to their mold, they would not have believed. They had seen the "bread of life" and did not believe (v. 36).

Verse 37 is one of the strongest affirmations of eternal security of the believer in the Bible. Reformed theologians attempt to use this passage to support their view of predestination whereby God only grants the capacity to some, the elect, to benefit from Christ's work on the Cross.⁵ However, there are several strong arguments against this position:

7) momentum testing; and 8) sharing the happiness of God. These components have been defined and studied at great length in our series on the Spiritual Life of the Believer.

³ Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 296.

⁴ The phrase "come down from heaven" is used seven times in this discourse. See Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1932), Volume V, 106.

⁵ This concept is inherent in the Reformed or Calvinistic understanding and definition of man's total depravity, God's unconditional election of believers, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. These five points are captured in the commonly referenced acronym TULIP.

- Such a position is directly contradictory to Jesus' Own teaching where He uses such words as "whosoever" and expresses His desire for unbelievers. Compare John 3:16 with 11:42 and Luke 23:34.
- It is contrary to the teaching of other writers of Scripture.
 - Paul desired for the unbelievers of Israel to be saved or delivered through their faith from the coming discipline upon the nation (Ro 10:1)
 - Paul taught that our Savior desired "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4)
 - Paul taught that Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for ALL (1 Tim 2:6).
 - Peter taught that God is not willing that any should perish (2 Pe 3:9)
 - The writer of Hebrews declared a similar principle when he stated that Jesus' death was for everyone (He 2:9).
 - Many other passages contradict the Reformed or Calvinist position on this subject, e.g. 2 Corinthians 5:14-19 and 1 John 2:2 just to name two.
- The term "all that" in the phrase "all that the Father gives Me" in verse 37 is in the neuter gender, not the masculine gender which would be the expected gender (cf. 3:6; 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 24) in such a construction if the Reformed understanding of this passage is correct. The neuter gender emphasizes the collective aspect of the Father's gift of believers to the Son, i.e. a corporate body focus versus an individual focus.⁶

In **verse 38**, Jesus makes a statement that is often overlooked in significance. Jesus did not come to do His own will, but the will of the Father Who sent Him. This statement, and others like it, reflects the concept of humility that Paul instructs us to use as an example.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Phil 2:5-8)

In **verses 39-40**, we find another strong affirmation of the eternal security of the believer. Jesus, like the good shepherd, loses none of His sheep. Jesus will also be responsible for their resurrection to everlasting life.

Jesus is Rejected by the Jewish Multitude (6:41-59)

The Jewish multitude began to "murmur" and complain about Jesus' statements that He came from heaven. Their complaint had a logic to it, but it was a logic not grounded in faith. It was a logic grounded in empiricism. They knew His parents and some may have even known Him as a lad. How could He have come from heaven? Like their ancestors who did not believe God's chosen agent, Moses, these Jews did not believe God's Own Son. They murmured like their ancestors (cf. Ex 15:24; 16:2, 7, 12; 17:3; Num 11:1; 14:2, 27).

Jesus' Reply – Jesus' statement that "no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" must be understood in balance with other passages. Jesus also stated that He would draw all men unto Himself (Jn 12:32). He taught that God the Holy Spirit would convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn 16:8-11). This is the manner in which God

⁶ I believe that Scripture supports a *corporate* view of election versus the Reformed or Calvinistic view of election that is based upon God's sovereignty choosing the individual for salvation and passing over or even choosing another for eternal damnation (double predestination). See William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People, A Corporate View of Election* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001) with emphasis upon pages 139-140 and Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free, A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1999) for excellent analysis of the subjects of corporate election and election, respectively.

draws men to the Son, i.e. through the convincing ministry of God the Holy Spirit to the unbeliever. The Holy Spirit's convincing ministry is related to Jesus as the Son of God since no man has seen God the Father except the Son (**v. 46**).

The word "believe" occurs about one hundred times in John. Here, in **verse 47**, it is used in a participial construction in the present tense. This means that Jesus was teaching the Jews that there needed to be an ongoing trust in Him instead of the sporadic trust based only upon the latest miracle.

In **verses 49-51**, Jesus contrasts the perishable food (manna) provided to the Jews in the wilderness who died with Jesus Who is the Bread of Life. The manna in the wilderness met only a temporal need in a limited way. The "bread" of which Jesus spoke met an eternal need and was equated to Himself (v. 51).

The Jews Quarrel (Murmur) in Response – They make light of Jesus' statements instead of attempting to determine what He really meant. Their arrogant presumptuousness regarding the inflexible mold or model of the Messiah that they had conjured in their minds would not allow anything but ridicule of that which did not fit into that mold. Their self-centeredness and self-absorption translated into closed mindedness and hatred of the one Who had just so recently provided for them so abundantly out of nothing. What makes this especially distasteful is the fact that Jesus had shown such compassion toward them so as to provide for them abundantly with the fishes and loaves.

Jesus Responds – Jesus' response (**vv. 53-58**) was designed to shock his hearers to the point that only those who were truly humble and who sought the Truth would remain. All others would leave without seeking the Truth. What did Jesus mean by the statement "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you?" Unless this is a second and different way from believing on Him, eating His flesh must be equivalent to believing on Him. One thing is certain – Jesus was not advocating cannibalism. Eating is just another figure of speech for receiving and assimilating Christ into one's own being, just as food is in a physical sense.⁷ He had already stated that "the work of God is to believe" in **verse 29**. Just as eating is a non-meritorious act and capability that God has made inherent in all mankind, man's exercise of faith is a non-meritorious act.

⁷ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1978), 131.