

Gospel of John Study **Session 15**

In our last session we witnessed Jesus performing two of His most well known miracles, which happened back-to-back. He miraculously fed the 5,000 men (along with the 10-15,000 accompanying women and children). Later that night, Jesus walked on water and this was witnessed by His disciples who were on a boat in the middle of the lake during some rough weather. The miraculous feeding will be used as the main illustration for Jesus' teaching in this session concerning the "bread of life". The miracle of walking on the water was to reinforce in His disciple's minds of His power and authority over this world. His directions were to be followed, even above their natural instincts or training, in order to see God's hand at work.

In this session, Jesus compares Himself with bread. He then dives into some deep waters by explaining what He means when He speaks of Himself as the bread of life and how one can partake of the bread of life. As it turns out, if one wants genuine life, eternal life, one needs to eat the bread of life. As we'll see, this teaching becomes a pivotal moment in the ministry of Jesus as not everyone understands this teaching, much less accept it. The problem is that most people live to satisfy their physical lives only and do not concern themselves with their spiritual well-being. As Jesus will point out, this is short-sighted as to live this way means missing out on what life was designed to be by God.

The metaphor Jesus used in this passage dealt with physical hunger. We've all had times when we have the thought, "I'm hungry." There isn't a day that goes by without us thinking this thought at some point. This is because God created our bodies to run on food. We feel the pangs of hunger and this is our body's warning system. We hear the growling in the pit of our stomach and that's telling us that we need to eat. This is a good thing in that it sets us looking for food which keeps us alive. When we do eat, it calms this emptiness inside of us. We feel filled and satisfied.

Now from the thought of physical hunger, Jesus moves the discussion to the level of a hunger within our souls which longs for satisfaction. In the same way that God gave our bodies an appetite that warns us that our bodies need to be fed with physical food, He also gave our souls an appetite which point that we are seeking for something that will satisfy our spiritual life. This is the basis for Jesus' teachings in the rest of chapter 6.

[John 6:22-33]

This crowd mentioned here is the same crowd that was fed by Jesus' miracle the day before. They had witnessed the miracle and were complete filled by the bread and fish the Lord created for them.

Q: Why did Jesus say these people sought after Him? (*v.26 - Because they ate the day before and were filled*)

Q: What did Jesus tell these people to do instead of working for food that perishes? (*v.27 - Work for food that endures to eternal life*)

This is beginning to sound a lot like the opening of Jesus' conversation with the woman

at the well back in chapter 4. Why bother with the water from the well when you can have the water that will bring eternal life?

Q: Do you remember from the last session, what did the people want to do with Jesus? (v.15 - *They wanted to force Him to become their king. They wanted to install Him as their physical king over them.*)

This opening of Jesus' teaching was a rebuke to the purely materialistic notions the masses were holding concerning the kingdom of God. It's like the woman at the well thinking that Jesus was talking about an endless supply of natural water that Jesus was going to supply to her. These people were thinking that by making Jesus their king, He would fill their stomachs with bread continually.

[Colossians 2:20-23]

Even though the bread was created miraculously, it still was destined to perish with the use. That's the problem with purely material things - they perish when they are used - like the physical water and bread Jesus used as illustrations of spiritual things which endure forever.

At the end of v.27 is quite a tag that often gets overlooked in this passage. In the English it says, "...for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." The literal translation goes like this, "... for this One the Father sealed, God." Jesus is referring again to God as His Father and stating that God has placed His seal of approval upon His Son so that the Son has been certified as God's own agent who alone can bestow this food - this bread that gives eternal life. There is no other way to get the bread of life except through Jesus, God's Son. This sounds like an oxymoron at first as Jesus is asking them to "work" for a gift that He gives. The key is found later in v.29 when Jesus redefines their concept of work.

Q: What is the question the people ask after this statement from Jesus? (v.28 - *What are we to do so that we are doing God's works?*)

The question of the crowd shows that they misunderstand what Jesus is trying to tell them. He was telling them not to work for food that will spoil or only satisfy for a short time. The people were focusing on the food but Jesus was focusing on the appropriate goal that the people should have. It wasn't that they needed to do something new and innovative to gain God's approval but rather that pursuing purely material blessings is not worth one's full energies. They are showing their desire for the material blessing by focusing on the work they need to do to get it. We do this, You give us that. Of course, this shows their infantile understanding of spiritual matters as they think that some work they can do will gain them eternal life. As we know, and as we'll see again, it is a purely a gift which is within the power of the Son of Man to offer and confer upon a person.

Q: What is Jesus' response to the people? (v.29 - *The work of God is to believe in Him whom He has sent, i.e.- Jesus. In other words, "Fine, you want to talk about works, here's one for you. Believe in Me, the One God sent to earth to give eternal life."*)

Here's the deal. Everything that Jesus is about to say links back to this verse (v.29). It is the very key to understanding the entire rest of this discourse the Jesus is about to give. The work God requires is faith -not just faith in faith but faith in the Him (the One the Father has sent). This faith in Christ that we must exercise in order to come to have eternal life is the fruit of God's activity - not our own. Thus this faith in Christ is the complete opposite of what Paul calls the "works of the law" in **Romans 3:28**.

Q: What do the people demand after this response from Jesus? (vv. 30-1 - *They demand a sign from Jesus.*)

This is ironic since He just fed them miraculously the day before. You would think that this would have been enough but all this did was prompt speculation that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah and now they wanted to see something beyond what even Moses performed. Moses gave us food from heaven, the manna, so now You, Jesus, can show us this food the doesn't spoil. In short they want Jesus to dazzle them.

[Exodus 16:14-21]

Manna was the bread from heaven, sent by God to sustain His children on their trek to the Promised Land. This food was the food for their time in the wilderness. Yet this food spoiled and those who ate it eventually died. It might have come from God but it didn't give eternal life. There were two basic reasons for the manna. The first was that the people were hungry and did need to eat. There would be no food in the desert to eat. Secondly, God wanted to show His people that He loved them and was powerful enough to provide for their needs so that they would come to love and trust Him.

Q: Based on Jesus' comments in vv. 32-3, what is the true bread? (*The true bread is Jesus referring to Himself. He is the bread that gives life to the world.*)

The manna was a picture of what was to come, Jesus. Just as God sent His people bread to eat and satisfy their physical hunger on their pilgrimage through the wilderness, He was going to show His love again by sending them bread to quench their spiritual hunger. God was sending a greater provision to meet a deeper hunger. Instead of appearing on the ground at dawn, this true bread appeared in a manger in Bethlehem one night.

It is possible that we often resemble the crowd who followed Jesus in this passage in that we hunger for the wrong bread. Just like the people who ate from the miraculous feeding, we enter our boats and travel to be with Jesus so that He will quench some physical hunger we have rather than seek Him for the spiritual nourishment He longs to offer us. Think of how captive we can become to making sure our physical hunger is met. How much time do we spend satisfying our bodily appetites especially when compared to how much time we spend seeking to satisfy our spiritual appetites? If you spend your life doing nothing but making sure your physical needs are met, you'll never get a day off. This is why so many Christians feel unsatisfied and that is because they seek to satisfy themselves with things that are destined to perish with the use. The full life, as we'll see is the life which seeks Jesus and not just the things which He offers and gives us out of His love for us. So while God will give us bread to meet our physical hunger,

only God's bread can give us true life - a life that of deep satisfaction and joy.

[Matthew 6:31-34]

This is the secret as to how to satisfy your spiritual hunger in Christ. Seek Him and the kingdom of God and He'll give you the things you need for physical satisfaction but also the deeper, eternal things as well. Don't worry about tomorrow as the blessings you receive today from the Lord aren't meant for tomorrow. Like manna, use what's been given today and realize that tomorrow will bring new blessings.

[John 6:34-51]

Now Jesus plainly identifies the bread of life with Himself. Now there can be no misunderstanding as to what/who Jesus is referring to when He speaks of the bread of life that gives eternal life. Notice that Jesus is also speaking of a spiritual satisfaction here because the one who comes to Jesus will not hunger and the one who believes in Him will not thirst. The inner, spiritual longings and cravings will be quenched by believing in Jesus. The satisfaction that is given by spiritual food is everlasting. No matter what food it is, where you buy it, how much you spend on it, or how much you eat, you will at some point in the future, want to eat again.

Q: What happened to those who ate the manna? (*v.49 - They still died.*)

C.S. Lewis put it this way, "I cannot find a cup of tea which is big enough or a book that is long enough." That which we think gives our life meaning is never quite enough. We think that when a certain event happens or a goal is reached or we hit this certain milestone, then life will be worth living and we'll be filled. Yet, it's never enough and we still end up dying in the end. Instead of all these worldly pursuits, let's look at Jesus' answer in this passage.

[John 6:27]

Q: What are we to not work for? (*The food that perishes*)

Q: What are we to work for? (*The food that lasts for eternal life that the Son of Man gives*)

[John 6:33]

Q: What is the bread of God? (*The One that came down from heaven - Jesus*)

[John 6:40]

Q: What do those who believe in Jesus gain? (*eternal life*)

[John 6:47]

Q: Who has eternal life according to this verse? *(those who believe in Jesus)*

[John 6:50]

Q: What must one do to the bread of life in order to gain eternal life? *(eat it)*

In these five verses (and four we didn't read) Jesus explicitly taught that He was the bread of life that came down from God in order to give eternal life to the people who would come to Him and eat this bread.

Q: What does Jesus say of the people of Galilee in v.36? *(They don't believe Him. This is an interesting point. The people saw bread and they saw the power of God but they did not see what those things signified. Only their curiosity and appetite for political power was aroused, not their faith.)*

V. 37 needs a bit of explanation. With the denunciation of the faith of the people of Galilee in v.36 we need to understand why Jesus continues His ministry at all. It would be tempting to think that these people saw a great miracle and benefitted from it and yet came away without any deeper understanding of God than when they first followed Jesus. This gets us to see that Jesus' confidence in a spiritually successful ministry was not based upon the number of people who saw the miracles and understood the truth from them. It was not based on how many souls got saved. Jesus confidence was based upon His Father bringing about the Father's redemptive purposes. The first part of v.37 speaks of Jesus' confidence being in His Father's activity rather than in any results gained from the signs and wonders He performed.

Now the second half of the verse is usually misinterpreted and misunderstood. This is a figure of speech called a "litotes". This is an understatement where something is affirmed by stating it in a negative manner. We say, "Not bad at all." is an example. Another example is, "He is a citizen of no great city" means that he is a citizen of a great city. A good translation of this verse might read then, "*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me and I will keep him in or preserve him.*"

Q: Who's will did Jesus seek to accomplish? *(v.38 - His Heavenly Father's)*

Q: What will Jesus do for all who the Father gives to Him? *(v.39 - He will lose none of them but raise them up on the last day)*

VV. 38-40 explain why Jesus will perfectly preserve all those who the Father has given Him. The heart of the incarnation, of Jesus' coming down from heaven, was to do the will of the Father who sent Him and that the Son would lose none of those who came to Him.

[Matthew 24:29-31]

[II Corinthians 1:20-22]

So what we see from these verses so far is that Jesus is the bread of life that gives us life

right here and now in that we are brought into a life-giving relationship with Jesus the moment we are saved. We can relate to Him now whereas through our sin, we were cut off from that relationship before. But secondly, we will be resurrected to live with Jesus forever after we die physically.

Instead of contemplating this teaching from a man who just conducted a huge miracle on their behalf the day before, they began grumbling with Him. In essence they are saying, “*We know who Jesus’ parents are. What right then does He have to claim a nobler or divine heritage?*” (Remember, Jesus is in His home territory.)

Jesus let’s them know that their grumbling is dangerous as well as insulting. By grumbling against Jesus after all they experienced, they are arguing that divine revelation can be sorted out and discerned by human discussion. Their attitude diverts them from divine grace and God being the only One who reveals spiritual truth. As long as man is content to remain confident of his own ability, without divine help to help assess the meaning of the experiences of life, he cannot come to the Lord. He cannot believe. It is only the Father who reveals the things of heaven and the things of eternity. This is the reason for v.44. The word “draw” means to drag, like drag a net. Only the Father can drag us to the place of spiritual truth but it is up to us to believe it once He opens our eyes to the truth. Jesus would not be so hard on people who failed to believe if they had no responsibility before God for their own souls.

This manner of this “drawing” is shown in v.45. The Father does not draw us with heavy hands like a kidnapper but rather with the wonderful wooing of a lover. It is an illumination planted by the Father in the heart and mind of a person through the Scripture.

[Isaiah 54:13]

[Hebrews 8:8-11]

This is an Old Testament promise concerning the restored Jerusalem. This verse is applied to the New Testament covenant community of faith in Jesus. But the point is that it is internal illumination that is required for one to come to Jesus in saving faith.

Q: According to v. 46 who alone has seen God? (*Jesus, the One who is from God*)

In other words, apart from the revelation that is given through Jesus Christ concerning God, no one knows anything about God at all. Jesus is the mediator and narrator of all such knowledge. Thus, there is something important to understand here. No matter however much people are unable to “hear” Jesus because of their moral delinquency and how much people can only hear Jesus if they are taught by God, is simultaneously true with the fact that people are only taught by God only if they hear Jesus. This goes back to what we were saying about God is alone is the giver of spiritual truth and we know God is at work when we see people starting to understand spiritual truth. This means they are starting to see Jesus at some level.

Q: Now we need to review a definition from a few sessions back. What does John mean when he says the word “believe”? (*Belief is a whole-hearted trust of whatever the object of faith is. It is faith that the object is true and can perform what it says it can perform. As it is used of Jesus constantly in the book of John, it means to put one’s full trust and confidence in Jesus as the Son*

of God and the Messiah and thus come into eternal life. We have faith that He will do what He is says He is able to do. It is not head knowledge or curiosity.)

[II Timothy 1:12]

Q: According to v.47, what does a person have to do in order to gain eternal life? *(Believe in Jesus)*

Jesus comes out and expresses again that He is the bread of life. While the forefathers of those listening to Him all ate the manna and died, those who eat of the bread of life will never die. Jesus expresses again that He has come down from heaven, from His Heavenly Father to be this bread of life for the people.

Q: What will happen to the person who eats the bread of life? *(v.51 - They will live forever.)*

Notice that Jesus is giving His life for the world. He is talking about His ultimate sacrifice that, at this point in history is still in the future, but He's speaking of the cross. His life will pay for the sins of mankind so that when they partake of Him, they will live forever. This alludes to the fact that His body will be broken and His blood will be spilt as a gift for our salvation and eternal life.

[John 6:52-58]

Q: What were the Jews arguing with each other about in v.52? *(They thought Jesus was suggesting cannibalism - literally eating Him.)*

Q: Jesus is using eating as a metaphor for what? *(Believing in Him)*

Let's go back to the analogy of eating we were discussing earlier. You've had a very busy day working and you are famished. You sit down and there are some dinner rolls on the table and you eat one or a few of them while the rest of the meal is being shuttled onto the table. Why do you do this? Because the only way to satisfy your hunger at this moment is to eat and there is food set before you. How do you eat the dinner roll? Do you put merely look at it? Do you put it in your mouth, chew it up and then spit it out? Or do you put it in your mouth, chew it up and then swallow it into your stomach, your inner being? It's the last one. The other two options are not eating. Only once the food goes down the gullet is it considered eaten. Once it is eaten, then you gain the satisfaction of your hunger being alleviated to some degree and you gain the strength or energy that the roll offers.

As we stated, eating means believing in this passage. When you believe Jesus then you gain His eternal life and gain His spiritual strength. When you eat Him, you believe in Him. When you drink His blood, you believe in Him. Thinking about Jesus is not believing. Knowing facts about Jesus is not believing. Understanding how Jesus saves a person is not believing. Believing is staking your life on the fact that the only way to live is to receive Him fully into yourself. It's putting all your confidence in Him as the only One who can give you life and strength and a future.

Q: In v.53 what does Jesus say the person who refuses to eat Him will not have? (*life in themselves*)

The one a person must eat is the Son of Man, the same One God set His seal upon thus it is unlike the flesh of anyone else. It is unique for the purpose of saving people from their sins.

What is interesting is that in v.54, Jesus changes the Greek word for eating. Before this verse, the word used is the typical verb for eating. It means to consume or devour something. But the word in v.54 and beyond means to munch upon, the grind thoroughly grind down with one's teeth first and then swallow. It denotes both a desire to savor the food but to also make sure it is fully mashed before eating it. It describes the person who savors the truths God brings to him mind but also thinks through what he is being asked to believe thoroughly rather than belief in a hasty manner. It's signifies a determined and intentional belief in Christ as well as a savoring of God's truths.

V.55 states that Jesus body and blood are true food and true drink. This means that they are the only food and drink available to mankind that lead to salvation.

[Acts 4:12]

What Jesus is saying is that only He can fill the emptiness inside of us. He can calm our restless spirit and satisfy our deepest needs through faith in Him.

Then after this comes to fallout to this teaching.

[John 6:59-71]

Q: Where did this teaching take place? (*v.59 - in the synagogue in Capernaum*)

Q: Who was grumbling about Jesus' teaching in this last section? (*v.60 - His disciples*)

The dividing line of who can come to Jesus and who can't is never race but instead rather response to Jesus and His teachings. We need to make a distinction between the word "disciples" and "the Twelve". Jesus had a horde of disciples, followers, yet there were 12 He personally chose and they accepted to be His inner circle of followers.

There are four things that the followers of Jesus found offensive through this last section of Scripture.

- 1) They were more interested in food, political Messiah-ism, and the miracles rather than in the spiritual realities to which the feeding pointed.
- 2) They were unwilling to relinquish their own personal sovereignty, even in religious matters, and thus could not take the first steps toward genuine faith.
- 3) They were also offended that Jesus claimed to be greater than Moses and uniquely sent by God as the One authorized to give eternal life.
- 4) The extended metaphor of bread and eating was itself offensive to them, especially when it came to eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

What is interesting is how Jesus points out how His teaching will be either less or more offensive. He asks the disciples what if they see the Son of Man ascending to where He was

before. Those who were offended are even more greatly offended by this statement while those who are seeking Him can see some relief in this thought. How people respond to this “scandal” will determine their destiny.

Q: Who actually gives life according to Jesus in v.63? *(The Spirit)*

This is where Jesus is breaking down the illustration into plain terms for His disciples.

Q: According to v. 63, what does not give life? *(The flesh. - This use of the “flesh” is not the same as the usual usage by Paul. Jesus merely means the physical body or material world does not give life.)*

What Jesus is saying is that if the words of His teaching are believed, instead of rejected, the people will see Him as the bread of life, One who gives His flesh for the life of the world, the One who alone provides eternal life. They will receive Him and believe in Him and come to taste eternal life even now in this life and enjoy the promise that He will raise them up with Him on the last day.

Q: What does v.64 tell us about the people who were following Jesus at that time? *(Not all of them believed Him. We don't know what John meant by “the beginning” (either the beginning of creation or the beginning of His ministry) but that isn't the thrust of the verse. What we know is that Jesus knew some of His followers would not trust Him and the supreme example of not trusting Him would be Judas, His betrayer.)*

V.66 is a sad verse. What it comes down to is this: “What they wanted, He would not give; and what He offered, they would not receive.” (F.F. Bruce). They walked with Jesus no more.

This led Jesus to question the twelve. This question is for the sake of the twelve and not really for Him. He knows the twelve need to articulate an answer for why they would be sticking around Him and not deserting Him as the rest of the crowd was doing.

Q: What was Peter's response to Jesus in v.68? *(Only Jesus has the words of eternal life. He admits that there is no other place where this message is available. He also calls Jesus the “Holy One of God”. This title for Jesus is used only one other time - by a demon in Mark 1:24/Luke 4:34.)*

Q: What is different about the twelve than the rest of Jesus' followers? *(v.69 - They have believed and come to know that Jesus is the Holy One of God.)*

Those who come to know Jesus as who He truly is, don't walk away from Him or at least not for long.

[I John 2:18-20]

While Peter's remarks could be taken as he and the twelve are far superior to those low-life other followers who quit and walked away from Jesus, Jesus does not allow that attitude to remain. He immediately reminds them that He chose them. They have no room for pride as they didn't choose Him. Even so, even with them remaining, one of the ones Jesus chose to be in the twelve was a devil - a betrayer - who is mentioned as Judas Iscariot in the next verse.

According to this passage, there are some followers who are true and some who are not.

Q: What are some of the characteristics of a true follower of Jesus? *(The true followers of Jesus, believe Him and trust Him with their spiritual lives and physical lives. They remain committed to Him, even when they don't understand Him fully. They believe Jesus true identity are He revealed it to us in Scripture. They want Jesus more than they want the things of this world. More answers possible)*

Here is a critical question for our culture: *"If you could have heaven with no sickness and all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ was not there?"* (John Piper)

The false disciples saw Jesus as a genie in a bottle. He was simply there to grant their requests. True disciples see Jesus as the prize, not the dispenser of prizes. Our love for Jesus, the real Jesus, must remain the foundation and anchor of our lives.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?