

God's Sovereign Will In Election

John 6.35-40 – vv.37, 44, 65

The portion of text to which I would like to give our attention is a part of what is often referred to as the “Bread of Life” discourse. As is often the case in John’s Gospel, the discourse serves to give meaning to one of the “sign miracles” of Jesus recorded by John. Jesus multiplied five small loaves of bread and two small fish into a feast which satisfied the hunger of more than 5,000 people – with 12 basketsful left over. Though it was a magnificent miracle on the level of creating something out of nothing – it served only to satisfy a temporary hunger and, without qualification, it ran the risk of being understood as nothing more than a convenient demonstration of power. Indeed, it could easily be argued that, to those who were fed and later eagerly sought Jesus, it was exactly that (cf. 6:25-27). Their interest only extended to the bread. It is that very “superficial” understanding which “prompted” Jesus explanatory discourse. As we have already seen, in the “Bread of Life” discourse Jesus pictures/explains His role in our rescue and salvation by the miracle of feeding the five thousand.

In the verses I read Jesus, by this time, has already admonished the crowd for only seeking “bread” and seeing His provision in only superficial terms – essentially they were looking for someone to feed their bellies. He said to them, “Do not work for food that spoils, ***but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*** (John 6:27 NIV). From there the dialogue advances on a somewhat straight line as Jesus calls the “seekers” to believe on “the one whom he (God) has sent” – that One, of course, being the Son of God or Jesus (cf. 6:29). Ironically, it is at that they ask Jesus for a “faith eliciting” sign that substantiates what He is declaring to them - like the sign Moses gave Israel in the wilderness when he gave them manna or bread from heaven. This sets the stage for Jesus to present Himself as the true bread from God, sent from Heaven, in order to give life to the world – true life, eternal life (cf. 6:30-33). It isn’t until we get to 6:34-36 that the narrative takes an ironic and drastic turn. In 6:34 Jesus seems to have the crowd right where He wants them. Those listening cannot make the connection between the true bread and Jesus - still they plead with Him, “Sir, always give us this bread.”

As we read Jesus’ response in 6:35 it seems to be going just as planned, “I am the bread of life. Whoever, comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” There it is! Certainly now all that is left is for five thousand people to fall at His feet in faith and the Kingdom is on the move – right? But the declaration of Jesus – “I am the bread of life” followed by the incredible promise He makes to all who come to Him in faith – ***dramatically stops the momentum of the dialogue*** because it doesn’t illicit understanding and deeper faith. Rather it is the catalyst to the blind unbelief of the crowd. Hence in 6:36 we *do not* see the mass profession of faith anticipated by the flow of the narrative - *rather we see* Jesus indicting the crowd for their *unbelief*, for seeing and not believing – for “blind’ unbelief. His apparent harsh indictment is seen to be spot on when at the end of all Jesus declares in 6:37-40 the grumbling crowd is stuck on Jesus’ human lineage rather than His sweet gospel declarations.

What looked like a promising move of the Spirit, a “wildfire” of faith consuming thousands at a time, has not only stalled with Jesus’ incredible proclamation of 6:35, it has turned into a mass departure of unbelief. By the time we reach 6:70-71 it is hard to see anything but the scorched earth of a resounding defeat – a discouraging thwarting of the redemptive purposes of God. The kingdom seems farther away than ever.

This brings us to 6:35-40. I believe these few verses serve as the catalyst for understanding what Jesus declaring about Himself and His mission, as well as for understanding why He responds to the “sign seeking” crowd the way He does. There are three basic things Jesus touches on in these six verses which present the heart of not only the exchange on this day but also of Jesus’ over all mission. These three things are equally relevant today as the church interacts with its world.

1. Jesus declares, “I am the bread of life.” In our introduction to John we talked about the “*I am*” statements of Jesus which carry much of the weight of John’s Christology. We will get into this more in a couple of weeks but there are several of the “*I am*” statements which are absolute – meaning they don’t provide they expected predicate – the most agreed upon being John 8:58, “Before Abraham was *I am*.” Here, in this text, we have the first of Jesus’ “*I am*” with predicate – I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the way, the truth and the life; I am the resurrection and the life...

2. In addition Jesus identifies the unbelief of crowd (cf. 6:36). He will press upon that unbelief in ways that force the issue. By the time the narrative finishes we go from about five thousand eager seekers – many of whom are called disciples – to twelve whom choose to remain – one of which is Judas the betrayer. This continues and deepens the evil opposition to Jesus until He is crucified (consider 12:12-49 – esp. 37-41). Listen to how T.F. Torrance describes what Jesus is doing, (“Incarnation,” page 155, para 1).

3. The final point is Jesus’ teaching on the Sovereignty of God in the salvation of all who believe – from the before the foundations of the world to the final resurrection of all believers in the last day. This is called – in theological terms – the doctrine of election.

We will address one of these elements each week – in reverse order. This week we will look at Jesus’ teaching on the Father’s sovereign election of all those who will believe. Next week we will look at the dynamic of Jesus interaction with unbelief – qualifying it as majestically love driven and grace filled. Finally we will look at the nuances – within the text – and beauty of Jesus declaring Himself to be the bread of life.

Jesus Declares That They Do Not Truly Believe In Him Because Those Whom The Father Gives To Him Will Come To Him – 6:36-37 - **Note:** This is an incredibly difficult teaching *BUT* it the very basis of our unshakeable hope. As we work our way through Jesus’ teaching I’m going to ask you to trust the text – the words of Jesus – as a reflection of divine, sovereign, gospel love.

A. God gives those He has chosen – those who are His own to Jesus and they come to Jesus. The “giving” (later “drawing”) of the Father is the decisive action in the individual “coming” to Jesus in “faith” or “believing” (cf. 6:35-37, 41-44, 52-65, also 66-70). **Only those the Father gives to Jesus will come and all He gives to Jesus will come.**

1. There are three times this is declared in the context of addressing a growing unbelief. Notice that in these other passages Jesus restates the truth of election. He says the same thing in slightly different language emphasizing slightly different nuances, which serve to close any possible loopholes to the difficult teaching of election.

In 6:35-37 Jesus does this to explain/qualify unbelief in the face of what is assumed to be faith/belief; 6:41-45 – now the crowd is grumbling in clear incredulity at Jesus’ assertions. Jesus indicts them and then explains in language that closes the “loopholes” inferred in 6:37; 6:52-65 – Jesus really presses hard on the unbelief in a full on assault on their sensibilities – “eat my flesh and drink my blood.” When many of His disciples object saying “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” Jesus takes them to the cross (cf. 6:60-65 – esp. v.65). This leads to a wholesale departure (cf. 6:66).

2. There is fourth time Jesus declares sovereign election – in this case as an explanation of Peter’s affirmation of faith (cf. 6:67-70).

B. This work of sovereign election on the part of the Father is the basis for our assurance in hope (cf. 6:37b-40).

1. The language Jesus uses assures that He *will* receive every single one whom the Father gives to Him – He *will not* “cast them out” (cf. 6:37b).

2. This means His work includes giving them eternal life, protecting or keeping them and then raising them up on the last day (cf. 6:38-40; 17:1-10).

Note: Jesus explains this sovereign election in terms that help us to see that it took place before the foundations of the world in the council of God – a decision of Intra-trinitarian Love in which each member of the Triune God shares (cf. 6:38-40).

The Father – in love for us - sends or commissions the Son (Incarnation) and “gives” to the Son/Jesus those who belong to Him – whom He has sent His Son to rescue.

The Son/Jesus – in love for us and for His Father - enters into full solidarity with fallen humanity (Incarnation) – those He has been sent to rescue – does the work of redeeming and keeping (bears man’s sin, curse and death to the cross in His own flesh – conquers it all in His substitutionary death – brings life in His resurrection and preserves life and glory in His ascension and exaltation).

We will learn that the Spirit is the “giving” or “drawing” agent of the Father. He draws or illumines or makes alive (regenerates) those whom the Father has appointed to life (cf. 6:63). He will permanently indwell those He has made alive – He conforms us to the image of Jesus (He gives us Jesus heart and mind) AND He keeps us or delivers us safely into His presence in the last day.

C. The strength of the Father’s work/plan to rescue fallen humanity – those who are His own – is rooted in His perfect and eternal will. Jesus has come to do the will of His Father (cf. 6:38-40; 17:1-10).

1. Jesus “came” to do the will of the Father who sent Him (cf. 6:38).

2. The Father’s will is that Jesus would rescue (give eternal life to) and keep and raise up on the last day – everyone whom the Father would give to Him (cf. 6:39-40).

3. Notice this understanding gives Jesus clarity in His calling and the freedom to pursue it. We see this in His interaction with superficial faith. He presses on it in order to reveal it as what it truly is – “blind” or “unseeing” unbelief (cf. 6:41-45, 60-66, 67-70). On the night of His betrayal - the eve of His crucifixion – Jesus prayed in the confidence and liberty of having perfectly accomplished the Father’s will. He would now – with the help of His Father by the Holy Spirit – surrender Himself to the cross - those whose unbelief He had identified and who would serve as agents of the enemy in torturing and crucifying Jesus - to pay the price of the Father’s will (cf. 17:1-10 – notice the way Jesus describes how He did the will of the Father – vv.3-5, 6-7, 8-10).

Divine And Sovereign Election Issues To Me/Us A Similar Calling AND Provides For Us The Very Same Clarity And Liberty Of Mission –

A. We have the high calling and the very great privilege to be chosen by Jesus to pursue the Father’s sovereign and eternal will in election. We have been brought into the life and love of God to proclaim the glory of His love to those whom He would use our ministry to draw to Himself – to give to Jesus (cf. John 15:16; 17:11-18; Titus 1:1-4).

B. It gives me tremendous confidence as I/we share our faith and life with those around us (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:21-24; Ephesians 1:3-14 – esp. 11-14). We can live in that sweet place of balance between Sovereign grace and human responsibility as we live and share. We do so in the knowledge that nothing – no intellect, no political movement, no national or military leader, no social or moral revolution of ideas or force (not even the very gates of hell) can withstand or thwart the sovereign will of God in His gospel purposes – not in culture, not in individual lives. Those who are His He will give to Jesus, by the Spirit, to make alive, keep and raise up with Him in the last day.

C. It gives me/us tremendous freedom and assurance in our prayer and ministry to those whom we love – our brothers and sisters in Jesus (cf. Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 3:1-4). ***I know that***

*John 6 does not end in defeat – rather in a profound and mysterious proclamation of victory
(cf. 6:67-70)!!*