

Jesus IS The Food That Endures *to* Eternal Life

John 6:22-36

Introduction: (Read John 6:22-36 or 25-27) Preaching this passage and passages like these does not lend itself easily to a verse by verse study because the key truths are repeated and layered throughout the text. It seems obvious that the issue of bread is central to the events and the exchange recorded in the narrative of John (“bread” shows up 18 times from 6:3-58). There are five times that Jesus is referred to (by Himself and also by the Jews) as “the bread of life” or “living bread” or “the bread from heaven.” The most difficult part of the discourse is found in 6:48-58, beginning with Jesus declaring for a third time that He is “the bread of life.” It is in that declaration for a third time that Jesus moves from the metaphor of Him as bread to the mind blowing picture of “feeding” on Him for “eternal life.” This is so difficult for the Jews that three times Jesus addresses their unbelief by saying that nobody can come to Him unless he or she has supernatural help (cf. 6:36-37, 43-45, 61-65).

These are such important truths and there is so very much to say about this discourse that what I would like to first build the basis for all that Jesus is saying about Himself by asking at least four questions which come up just in the reading of this text.

1. What does Jesus mean when, in 6:26, He indicts the Jews by saying that they didn’t come because they saw a sign but because they ate from the loaves and were “filled” or “satisfied?”
2. What is the “food” of 6:27 for which the Jews/fallen humanity labors? What is the “food” for which Jesus calls us to labor?
3. A lesser but still important question is – What does Jesus mean when He says that the Father has placed His “seal” on the Son of Man?
4. What does Jesus mean when He says that the work of the Father is “to believe in the one He has sent?”

What Does Jesus Mean When He Says “You are looking for me, not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill”? - cf. 6:26 – Once again Jesus is seen to know the hearts of men and women – even beyond what they themselves know.

- Jesus is identifying the condition of the heart of unbelief – a heart on display in the Jews but also existing in all of fallen humanity. It is a heart which is ***unwilling*** and ***unable*** to see just what they saw. It is a heart which longs for lesser things – temporary pleasures and satisfactions – a heart with its “eyes” set on pleasures that do not, indeed cannot last or satisfy. **Key:** The sign ***they saw*** was the power of Jesus to make bread which satisfied their physical hunger. ***Their seeing stopped at the bread because their longings, their hunger stopped at their bellies!!***

- Jesus was engaging their unbelief by addressing a category of thinking or a perspective which is bred into all of humanity. We are conditioned to think about - or better - to give priority to the needs and desires we have for the things that are necessary for life in this temporal, physical, tangible world. We need bread/food to satisfy not only our *feeling* of hunger but we need food as sustenance for life itself – *nourishment for our bodies*. However, though these are good things – necessary things – they are secondary things and cannot be rightly pursued or enjoyed as primary things!!

When Jesus miraculously multiplied the bread and the fish, the Jews whom He fed and His disciples saw His power *as they were/we are conditioned to see it*. Jesus supplied the stuff for which they toiled daily. *Here Jesus was radiating the glory of the Divine Son of God incarnate. He was revealing Himself as He really is and they could not see beyond His flesh* (cf. 1:10-13; 6:40-41). So - when He made the bread – they could only see the miraculous provision of bread – even His disciples saw only bread (cf. Mark 6:50-52). Jesus was peeling back the veil of His flesh and showing forth a beam of His Divine glory in order to illicit true and saving faith (cf. John 1:12-13, 14-18; 20:30-31). *But they only saw bread from an extraordinary “man.”* It is as though they saw a bolt of lightning strike in front of them and they were in awe of its power. Yet they never bothered to lift their heads to follow the lightning bolt and to look back up to the heavens to see where it came from!

- Consequently - they came “**looking for**” the Jesus *they saw* and not the Jesus *to whom the glory of that moment pointed – the Jesus He Himself revealed*. To them He was the bread maker – the supplier of bread. The miracle was the effulgence of His glory - not the glory itself!! He came to offer so much more than beams of glory – so much more than bread. He came to offer infinitely more than they saw or sought – *He came to be Living Bread – the bread of life!!*

Note: After Jesus called out the Jews (and the disciples) for seeking only bread He calls them to “work” for the “food” that endures unto eternal life. In their spiritual blindness – they saw only “bread” and pursued Jesus for “bread” when Jesus stood before them offering Himself as “the bread” that gives life. **He would now begin to set a new category before them, which is addressed in our second question.**

What Is The “Food” For Which Jesus Calls Us To “Work”? – cf. 6:27 – We must first identify the meaning of the “food” about which Jesus speaks and then about the idea of “labor” in the context of this discussion.

- The “work” of which Jesus speaks is addressing the priority commitment of our lives – the stuff we spend ourselves on or seek as our fullness or our hope. “Work” itself is necessary and good. Jesus is talking about the basis by which we choose to set the course of our lives – consciously or unconsciously – money, achievement, glory from man, beauty, pleasure, education, possessions, health, safety – the stuff that we think about when we say, “If only I could have or do...I would be happy...” (cf. Jeremiah 2:12-13).

- The “food” in 6:27a becomes a metaphor (later picked up in the imagery of bread) which depicts the stuff which we “hunger for” or our “appetites” compel us seek if we are to experience contentment – satisfaction – “fullness” of soul (cf. 6:30-31). There are two sides of the imagery -

1. There is the real bread/food – the stuff made of grain and baked in ovens. It is bread that satisfies physical hunger. **Note:** This “real” bread, in the greater discussion, becomes the image of all human and temporal need. This includes the need for water, shelter, safety, belonging, significance, purpose, identity, love, marriage/family etc. ***the need for a strong and stable boat and the learned skills to take it safely through a storm!*** These needs move us to pursue them through our natural appetites. These are things for which we must labor and prepare – they are good but secondary things. ALL of these needs can only be met temporarily by the provisions available to human labor – but they must be met. The things which meet these needs will leave us wanting and eventually spoil in decay – we were created with a far deeper need – created for something far greater.
2. We were created with a need for the “true bread from Heaven” which is Jesus Who alone satisfies the deepest needs of our soul. He and the satisfaction He gives in Himself does not spoil - it endures unto eternal life (cf. 6:27a; 32-35). Jesus declares that He is the One who will give us this enduring “food” – indeed Jesus will go on to say that He is the “bread of life,” “the bread from Heaven” (cf. 6:33-35, 48-58).

Note: This teaching seems to come together after the Jews ask for Jesus to give them a sign like the God gave Israel through Moses when He sent bread down from Heaven - the manna which supplied them in the wilderness. The manna itself was a sign which the Jews were given of God’s faithful presence and His commitment to meet all of their needs while they traveled through the hostile and barren wilderness which could not provide for them all that they needed. They – like these Jews – saw bread alone. They did not see God giving Himself to them. Predictably – though the manna satisfied their hunger and their need for nourishment, it was not enough! They soon became bored and they grumbled – it did not satisfy them. They saw only “bread” and wanted variety and better flavor – they soon longed for Egypt where they thought the food tasted better. ***Imagine if every morning they had gotten up to gather the manna and looked up to Heaven to see follow the beam of glory to its source and understood this to be God giving Himself to them!! Imagine how they would’ve grown in their experience and understanding of the active and perfect love of God (cf. Ephesians 3:14-21)!!***

What Does Jesus Mean When He Says That The Father Has Placed His “Seal” On The Son Of Man? – cf. 6:27c

- In its context – the “seal” is likely that which Jesus mentioned in John 5:36-40. It is the witness of the Father who sent Jesus – which includes the works Jesus did to “give life to whom He was pleased to give it” by the power and authority the Father gave Him. But very simply – in this context – the Father’s seal means to the Jews and to the disciples that Jesus is the Father’s lone offering of life to those who would believe.

– So - when Jesus told the Jews that “the Son of Man” would give them the food that endures – they asked Jesus what they must “do in order to work the works of God” or “to do the works God requires.” Jesus simply says that the “work of God is to believe in the one he has sent.” Ironically after the Jews ask Jesus for an authenticating sign and they give Him the example of the manna in the wilderness (cf. 6:30-31) He declares that He Himself is the true bread from Heaven which the Father sent – not the manna – and it is the bread that He Himself is which provides “eternal life” - enduring nourishment and life – for the soul. The Jews plead with Jesus to give them that bread (cf. 6:34). This is like the women at the well near Sychar (cf. John 4:13-15).

– Jesus’ response to their plea is to declare “***I Am the Bread of Life***” and He promises that He is the end of soul hunger and soul thirst for all who come to Him in faith (cf. 6:35).

They were faced with this offer and they rejected Him in unbelief (cf. 6:36).

What Does Jesus Mean When He Says That The Work Of The Father Is “To Believe In The One He Has Sent?” – cf. 6:28-29

- This is utter irony – the work of God is simply to believe!! To leave the sin for which Jeremiah indicted Israel – for which Jesus indicts the Jews – a sin to which we were doomed in Adam’s rejection of God in the garden for the fruit (cf. Jeremiah 2:11-13; John 6:27; also Romans 1:18ff). It is to accept by faith the invitation to eat – (Isaiah 55:1-2).

- To believe in Jesus – according to the NT – is to see Him and pursue Him as our soul’s greatest delight. It is to trust the promise of Jesus (cf. John 15:9-11). It is the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3:14-19 and it is on full display in His life (cf. Philippians 1:21; 3:7-14; 4:10-13).

- This changes everything about us – we labor to bake bread and to build boats but always with the knowledge that Jesus alone is the enduring “bread of life.” Work provides the things necessary for life but ultimately God is sovereign over the manna which falls from Heaven. We work in the resting truth that there is no boat, there is no skill set that can make us impervious to the storm. Medical technology can extend life and make it less physically painful but only Jesus can fill those days with the fullness of His joy – with all of the fullness of God which comes from the profound and ongoing experiences of His love. ***Faith is to labor to lay aside my hope for fullness and joy – for ultimate satisfaction – in temporal things and to pursue Jesus!! We need to fill those cisterns with concrete and drink from the spring of living water!!***