

13. Jesus, the Bread of Heaven

John 6:16-59

The Gospel According to John

After the multitude had witnessed the miracle of having all been fed by a boy's lunch, they immediately wanted to proclaim Christ as King by force. The Lord would not allow it (John 6:15). He knew that His time had not yet come. The time for His coronation as King is still before us as we follow Christ in this journey. Within a few months, He will be crowned with thorns upon His head, and so He departed from them to a solitary hill to pray (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46). Christ instructed His disciples to return to Capernaum on the northwest side of the lake while He sent the multitude away (Matthew 14:22):

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. ²⁰But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." ²¹Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. ²²The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. ²³Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus (John 6:16-24).

In this passage, we see another test that the disciples experienced. The distance from the east side of the Sea of Galilee to the west is eight miles, and the disciples were in the darkness of the sea, and the waves grew rough. The worst thing they were enduring was that Jesus was not with them. Many of us, too, go through times of darkness where we sail through rough waters. As a commercial fisherman, I have been through many rough storm winds in one of the worst seaways in the world, the North Sea off the east coast of England. It is in times of darkness that it is good to know that Jesus is in the boat with you and that you are never alone. He has promised that He will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5).

How wonderful that Jesus did not leave them to the strong winds and darkness, but He came to their aid. He had no problem with the weather, and He came to them walking on top of the water. As soon as He got into the boat, the boat somehow reached their destination, and they didn't have to row another mile (v. 21). The next morning, the multitude realized that Jesus had left, so they went searching for Him. May we, too, be found to be searching for Christ Himself and not just for the things that He does for us.

Do Not Work for Food that Spoils

²⁵When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" ²⁶Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷Do not work

for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." ²⁸Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" ²⁹Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." ³⁰So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" ³¹Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³²Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven" (John 6:25-32).

In the sixth chapter of John, after the feeding of five thousand people, those who were returning were surprised that Jesus was in the synagogue in Capernaum before them, for they did not see Him getting into the boat the evening before (v. 25). They went to the Synagogue in Capernaum that morning (John 6:59) and began to ask Him questions about how hard they must work to get into the Kingdom of God. All of the words from chapter six, verses 26 to the end of the chapter, are part of a sermon that Jesus spoke that morning in the synagogue in Capernaum. They said, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (v. 28). To those who had been with Him the day before, He said that they were only pursuing Him because they wanted to be fed again, just as in the time of Moses when God fed them manna every day (Exodus 16:45).

Wouldn't that be wonderful, i.e., not to have any food bill week by week? Think of the amount of money we could save! Jesus quickly reminded them that it was God who fed them with manna, not Moses. Moses did not produce the manna; he received it like everyone else. Again, this shows us the character of Christ. He is zealous for God to get the glory for everything that He does. It must be so for us, too. He wanted to point them to the Father and for the crowd to hunger for the things of God, for that was far more critical than witnessing a miracle. The Lord was challenging their motives. Why did they come out to hear Him? There were also those who were not physically hungry, but they were hungry for the "supernatural experience." Jesus wanted them to realize that *HE* was and is the experience, i.e., the life for which they craved. Christ was representing the heart of the Father, Who can satisfy their souls, not just their physical needs, but with spiritual food, i.e., bread from heaven.

His heart went out to them for their pursuing Him for daily food like they had received the day before. He said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life" (v. 27). In this sentence, the Lord is contrasting natural food, i.e., that for which we work, with spiritual food, which is given to us by the grace of God, not by our works. Spiritual food will benefit us for eternity. Eternal things require from us no work but to trust in the Son of God. Just as eating a large meal gives one a satisfying feeling within and results in our feeling full, in the same way, we are to spend energy and labor pursuing the things that truly satisfy the soul, i.e., Christ Himself and His Word. Without this food that endures to eternal life, we feel empty and dissatisfied within ourselves.

There is a tendency to spend more time at our commercial labor to give us large houses and brand-new cars, but living life by chasing after material riches will result in spiritual poverty, such as that which the church of Laodicea was pursuing, mentioned in the Book of Revelation. When Christ confronted those at Laodicea because their spiritual condition was lukewarm, He told them their actual condition as He saw it: □

You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked (Revelation 3:17).

What a tragedy it would be to find at the end of our lives that we are weak in the things of God because we valued spending our time on our daily business, many of us going far beyond putting bread on the table rather than seeking to prosper in the things of God. This was what I began to realize as a commercial fisherman. When I was still very young, I began to question what my life was about. Why was I working such long hours for more money than I needed or could spend? I felt like I was living to work rather than working to live, and even the things that I could afford did not bring me what I was seeking. I became aware of the barrenness of my soul, my inner life. I began to take off months at a time, searching for something that would satisfy my soul. There was something within me, i.e., a missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle of life, an emptiness on which I could not get a handle.

The symptoms of my inner disharmony and emptiness were that I could not rest until I found whatever it was for which I was looking. This was a gift of God and a good thing for my soul, and I will be eternally grateful to God for the emptiness that I felt inside. These kinds of thoughts were what drove me to travel the world in search of something that I was missing. When I was fifteen years old, I thought that I would have fulfillment in life by being part of the “in” crowd, and then I'd feel like I'd made it. That didn't satisfy my inner emptiness. Then, it was to have a beautiful girlfriend and a cool motorbike to carry her on the back. Then, it was a car, a house, even my own fishing boat with my brother. When those things didn't satisfy me, it was drugs and then traveling to different countries, but nothing satiated my inner thirst and hunger.

Prince Charles of England once spoke of his belief that “For all the advances of science, there remains deep in the soul, if I dare use that word, a persistent and unconscious anxiety that something is missing, some ingredient that makes life worth living.” Bernard Levin, perhaps the most celebrated English columnist of this generation, once wrote about the void in his life. He said:

Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, together with such non-material blessings as a happy family, and yet lead lives of quiet, and at times noisy, desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is a hole inside them and that however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motor cars and television sets they stuff it with, however many well-balanced children and loyal friends they parade around the edges of it...it aches.¹

Question 1) Have you experienced inner disharmony? What words would you use to describe an “inner void?” How have you tried to fill that void?

For many people, this void drives them to work hard, thinking that success at work will satisfy their inner emptiness. I remember one day when I was working my dad's boat alone (something dangerous to do), I went further to a fishing ground to which we didn't usually go. For eighteen hours, I caught more fish than I had ever caught before. I had hit the big time! Now, I was

¹ As quoted by Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, Published by Cook Ministry Publications. Page 13.

earning real money. The excitement that I felt at my success was like a drug that had my head spinning that night so much so that I could not sleep due to thinking of how I could do better the next night and make more money.

I took a look in the mirror, and I did not like what I saw; I could see the greed that sat on the throne of my heart, and I did not want it to rule me. Success at work did not satisfy my spiritual need. It is a deception to think that we can work hard to please God. Life can be likened to playing a board game. There comes a time when you have to put all the pieces back into the box, and what then?

The people that now spoke with Jesus had the same thoughts on their mind: **“What must we do to do the works God requires?”** (v. 28). They didn’t get it: they couldn’t work for spiritual things. Jesus replied saying that the only work that would satisfy their souls was to believe in the One Whom the Father had sent—Christ: **“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent”** (v. 29). God has deliberately made it so simple that a child can come to Christ and be saved.

Jesus the Bread of Life

³³For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." ³⁵Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:33-40).

They responded to Him by requesting that He would give them this bread from that time on (v. 34). He told them: **“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”** (v. 33).

When they responded with desire for such bread, saying, **“From now on give us this bread”** (v. 34), their words reveal that they were hoping for some daily food that would come to them from that time on, just like the manna in the time of Moses came every day. However, Jesus is talking in spiritual terms:

Then Jesus declared, **“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty** (John 6:35).

Question 2) What did Jesus mean by His statement that He is the Bread of Life?

Bread was the staple of life in Israel in those days. My wife, Sandy, and I lived in Israel for several months with a lovely couple, an Australian lady named Christine, who was married to a Japanese tour guide, Bara. When we had dinner together, no matter how full Bara was, if he

didn't have rice with his meal, he hadn't eaten a proper meal. It was like he had two stomachs. If his rice stomach had not been fed, he was still hungry, and he had to go and cook rice even after eating a big dinner of meat and potatoes. It did not matter how big the meal was. If he did not have rice, he was not satisfied. Deep inside our being, we have an inner stomach that needs spiritual food. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" He is the One who fills the empty "spiritual stomach." If the Lord had been speaking to a Japanese person, perhaps, He might have said, "I am the rice of life." Only Christ can fill our spiritual stomach. He is the staple diet of the soul, the One who fills the void that is deep within us. □

Here in this Scripture above (v. 35), we have the essence of how to become a Christian and have the emptiness within our hearts filled. It is to come to the person of Christ and feast on His life in a spiritual sense, believing or trusting in Him. This experience of eating this bread is not so much talking about a once-for-a-lifetime bite, as in inviting Christ into one's life and being born again, but daily feasting on Christ, being changed into His image and likeness as we live for Him. □

The eating of manna every day by the Israelites in the wilderness was just a picture of the future reality that Christ would put on the spiritual table for us. Paul the Apostle put it like this: "**And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory**" (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are transformed inwardly as we feed spiritually on Christ and appropriate (take for one's own use) His power and life just as a branch from a vine draws its life from the vine rootstock itself. Using the vine analogy, Jesus said:

⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

There is a spiritual connection that God makes with us when we are born-again and receive the free gift of new life in Christ. The Spirit of God comes and lives in us and helps us maintain that connection, a flow of spiritual life from God, sustenance that gives people a sense that all is well with their inner being, their soul. We can grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and so experience distance through any willful sin that we commit, which in turn will bring chastening by Him (Hebrews 12:8-10) as a father does a son, but once you have made that connection to Him, you will never go hungry and will never be thirsty (v. 35). Once I came to Christ, I have never looked further. I knew instantly that this was what I was seeking. My inner hunger and thirst for God were filled, and yours can be, too, if it isn't already. Commentator R. Kent Hughes says this about Christ being the bread of life:

There are several similarities between manna and Jesus, "the Bread of life." The manna typified Jesus, for it was white like fallen snow, just as Christ was without blemish or imperfection. Manna was also accessible. That was one of its main virtues. When a man walked outside the camp to gather it, he had a choice. He could either tread on it or he could pick it up. We can either tread on Jesus or we can take him as our Savior. To put it another way, the Scriptures say Jesus can either be a cornerstone or a stumbling block. How we respond to Him makes all the difference.²

² R. Kent Hughes, *That You May Believe*, Commentary on the Book of John, Page 206, Crossway Publishers.

The Drawing Power of God

⁴¹At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴²They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?'" ⁴³"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. ⁴⁴"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father (John 6:41-46).

When Jesus told them that He had come down from heaven (v. 38) to do God's will, they started reasoning and whispering to one another about His childhood in Nazareth around forty miles from Capernaum. Some of them, perhaps, knew His father and mother. How can He say that He came down from heaven? Jesus' response was to talk about the drawing power of the Spirit of God. What did He mean by saying, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him?" (v. 44).

In my late teens and early twenties, I had many questions about life's mysteries, especially as a commercial fisherman on the east coast of England, e.g., the many near-death situations that I experienced. The questions often came to me about whether or not I would live beyond death, and what that life would be like. My spiritual hunger progressed to the point where I sought out the answers to life in philosophic works, but it never satisfied my gnawing spiritual craving. Working with my father as a commercial fisherman enabled me to take extended time off work, as long as I had someone experienced to do my job for me. I began to travel and search out Buddhism and Hinduism over a couple of year's period, thinking those religions would satisfy my craving for the missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle of my life. Something was missing, and no matter where I traveled to, it eluded me.

I traveled to Europe, Asia, and North Africa, too, eventually coming to the USA, and South America, also. I was on a search for truth and a filling of the void in my heart. Whenever thoughts about searching out Christianity came to me, I would immediately dismiss them due to my wrong belief that it was all about someone who died two thousand years ago as a martyr. The enemy of my soul suggested to me anything but biblical Christianity. I had heard it said that "all one had to do was believe," but that was too simple for me! I thought the answer to my longing for truth was that I had to work hard to get it, i.e., that it had to "be attained."

I thought, wrongly again, that it would have to be costly or far away! My concept of being a spiritual person began to feel like an unobtainable goal, yet when I started to read the Bible, Jesus presented truths that a child could understand. Could it be that simple? Just "to believe" was opposite to all I had learned about life up to that point. My problem was that I didn't know what God was like, i.e., that He is a Lover and a Giver, and that He is the only One Who could satisfy the hunger of my soul, and yours, too, for He is the Bread of Heaven.

It was only after I came to Christ that I realized that the Spirit of God had been drawing me, and that was why I had such a deep inner longing. Here's the way Jesus described this drawing power:

All that **the Father gives me will come to me**, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away (John 6:37).

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws him**, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44).

When you came to Christ (if you are a Christian), it was because you were drawn in some way. It might have been a friend whose life seemed "different." It could have been a message that somehow struck home deeply. Maybe, it was the deep dissatisfaction about which we have already talked. It may also have been a book that you read where a certain sentence stuck out and gripped you like a hook; it stuck fast in your soul, and it was just a matter of "reeling you in" to Christ. These are all shreds of evidence of the Spirit of God at work, wooing you to Christ, so that you may receive the gift of God deposited in you. In verse 45, Jesus again described how God works in this way: "Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him **comes to me**" (v. 45).

Question 3) Share your experience with one another of the drawing power of God. How did Christ draw you personally? How have your initial thoughts about God changed over time?

Eating Christ's Flesh and Drinking His Blood

⁴⁷I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." ⁵²Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:47-59).

What a difficult statement to make to a Jew, no wonder many of them turned back from following Him at that point (v. 66). As a nation, God had forbidden them to drink blood (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 7:26-27), so how are we to interpret this statement? There are those who claim that they have the power to literally change bread and wine into the body of Christ and His blood, but is this correct? Should we take this as a literal statement or a spiritual statement? Jesus explains quite clearly that He is speaking in spiritual terms. He said to them, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life (John 6:63).

We had no problem understanding Jesus when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well in Samaria, i.e., that when He was talking about the water that He would give, He was talking in terms of the Spirit of God (John 4:13-14). Why should we think in literal terms about eating His flesh and drinking His blood? When He said, “**I am the vine**” (John 15:5) or, “**I am the door of the sheep**” (John 10:10), I don’t believe for a minute that He was speaking in literal terms. He was speaking in picture language. The Passover lamb, which was a type of the sacrificial death of Christ, had to be consumed entirely and none left over for the morning (Exodus 12:9-10). Eating His flesh and drinking His blood is speaking about a total encounter with the Lord Jesus. We are to appropriate Christ (To take for our own personal use). There is no room for half-heartedness with Christ. One must give up one’s life completely (Luke 9:23-26).

At the time He was saying these words, it was close to the time of Passover (John 6:4). As a person at Passover was to eat all of the lamb, in the same way, we are to spiritually feed on the person of Jesus, the Bread of Life and the true fulfillment of the Passover Lamb of God. Just as we consume bread and wine and the goodness of that eaten is taken by the blood to bring nutrition to every part of the body, so partaking of Christ’s life in a spiritual sense is to allow His Word and His life to touch every area of our character. It is continually being daily filled and controlled by His Spirit, living for Him and not for yourself.

The Bible is clear as to what happens to us when we give our lives to Christ. Paul the Apostle wrote, “**For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God**” (Colossians 3:3). The only way to eternal life is to partake of the Bread of Life, the staple diet of the Christian. This calls for radical steps of giving up ownership to yourself, and all that you have. Isaac Watts, the Christian hymn writer, said, “Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” Do you have Him? And does Christ have you?

After wandering the world hungering and thirsting for something to satiate my inner longing, somebody, at last, sat down with me and explained the Gospel, i.e., that Jesus loved you and me, and that He died in our place as a substitute. I finally understood that God is not angry toward us. That is just a strategy of Satan to keep us from Christ Whose appeal is for us to come to Him, believe the Gospel, and be radically changed within. We are to receive Him into the very substance of our being and feed on Him for the rest of our lives, which starts at the point of believing and receiving Him. I accepted Christ the first time I had it explained to me, and I have never been hungry since. This eternal life we are given begins upon taking that step of faith. Jesus could not be more explicit about it than when He made this statement:

I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life (John 6:47).

Prayer: Father, thank You for giving Your Son as the Bread of Life. I now come to You and entrust my life into Your capable hands. I turn from my empty way of life and believe the good news that Jesus, the Son of God, died in my place and that He paid the debt of my sin so that I could receive the gift of eternal life. I receive today the gift of eternal Life and the eternal Bread of Life for my soul. Amen.

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