

# **Bread From Heaven**

**John 6:35-59**

**May 1, 2022**

Read John 6:35-59

This is the Word of the LORD.

This is the second part of the sermon you did not hear last week. I am going to assume all of you read those verses, studied them, and are prepared for me to build upon them in this week's sermon. Having KLDP inspire us in worship last week is no excuse for slacking off.

Actually, I am going to do a little bit of review and background for today's verses before we jump into things. It has been more than a month since we were in this setting in chapter 6, so let me catch us up.

We have been looking at the gospel of John this year. In chapters 1-4, John was introducing readers to Jesus. The whole point of the gospel – John would write later in this work – was “so that [we] may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing [we] may have life in his name.” (John 20:31). Thus, the early chapters were committed to introducing the power and wonder of Jesus' birth and early ministry. The introduction of Jesus concluded with his blessing non-favored, non-religious people: giving living water to the Samaritan woman at the well and healing a royal official's son.

In chapters 5-10, John's focus was on developing the reasons for Jesus' conflict with the religious authorities. He healed the paralytic man on the sabbath, “Take up your mat and walk.” That was a huge deal. As John wrote, “The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore, the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath.” (John 5:15-16) Things escalated when Jesus responded, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.’ For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.” (John 5:17-18)

## **Chapter 6: Feeding The 5,000**

A month ago, we started chapter 6 with Jesus' miraculous feeding of the crowds with two fish and five loaves. One commenter summed up:

The statement as to the nearness of the Passover (v 4), the identification of Jesus as the prophet who should come (cf Deut 18:15), and the discussion on the bread from heaven within the discourse (vv 31–33) combine to indicate that the feeding miracle is understood as falling within the fulfillment of the hope of a second Exodus. This flows together with the thought of the event as a

celebration of the feast of the kingdom of God, promised in the Scriptures (Isa 25:6–9).<sup>1</sup>

## **Chapter 6: Walking On Water**

Then, the last Sunday prior to Holy Week, we talked about Jesus' walking on water. After the miracle feeding, Jesus sent the disciples on ahead of him to cross the Sea of Galilee, then walked on the water joining them in the middle of the night. They were somewhat freaked out by seeing Jesus coming near the boat.

"Then he said to them, 'It is I, do not be afraid.'" How awesome it must have been to hear that voice they recognized. There are a couple of things we observed:

First, Jesus brought with him the peace that passes all understanding. Even though they could not – and we cannot – fully explain the mechanics of *how* Jesus did what he did, the point was that he did it and the entire situation was transformed. It was the relief of instantly knowing everything was going to be ok, everything was as it should be, and Jesus was in control.

Second, Jesus' walk on the water was another manifestation of how much greater than Moses he was. For the Jews, the Lord parting the Red Sea allowed Moses to lead them to escape the Egyptians on dry ground. Jesus did one better – by himself simply walking *on* the water. The LORD did it for Moses; Jesus did it.

Third, the reason why Jesus' doing it was so important was because walking on water was consistent with poetic language attributed *only* to God.

## **Chapter 6: The Next Day Across The Sea**

We were briefly interrupted by Palm Sunday and Easter, and now we return to the story here the day after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 and the morning after Jesus 'walk on water. We pick up the story as the crowd discovered that Jesus and the disciples had gone across the sea. The crowd got into boats and went across after Jesus.

The sermon you did not hear began as the crowds found Jesus. They began asking questions. The key word in verses 25-34 was "work." Watch how this played out.

- When the crowd gathered, they said, "How long have you been here?" It was a mild rebuke like, "Hey, what about us?" Jesus answered the rebuke by saying, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." He was challenging them because he perceived they wanted to see another miraculous feeding and were missing the point of who he was.

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<sup>1</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, Word Biblical Commentary NT, John, volume 36, p. 88.

- The crowd responded by saying, “What must we do to perform the work of God?” The thought here was that Jesus was talking about something tangible. Their question asked how they must labor? In other words, what did they have to do? Were they supposed to do something like they did for normal bread – do the job, get paid, and then purchase their bread?
- Jesus answered, “This is the work of God, **that you believe in him whom he has sent.**” **Faith** is the work of God.

Faith is the work of God? “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” That’s what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2. Here, however, Jesus said that faith was the *work* of God. Are those two contradictory?

Not at all. We *are* saved by grace – the gift of God – **through** faith. Faith is not passive. It is active. Faith is not intellectually assenting to a proposition, it is personal commitment and engagement. Faith means we have **committed** to being, to acting, to growing, to living as his disciples. We are Jesus’ followers, which means – by definition – that we are moving as he moves. Our job, our vocation, our calling, is to be servants of the living God – wherever it is he has placed us, whatever it is he has gifted us to do.

### **Chapter 6: The Teaching In The Capernaum Synagogue**

And that brings us to our verses this morning. The crowd which had been fed – the ones who had traveled across the Sea of Galilee to see him again – responded favorably to Jesus’ teaching. They said, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus began to explain what that meant.

Just one last context note: John appears to have combined several different episodes in this one narrative. We move from Jesus addressing the crowd that had followed him to addressing skeptical Jews in a synagogue setting. Our verses today end with, “He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.”

### **Bread From Heaven**

To the crowd Jesus said, “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” This was a bold statement. It was a revelation of the *sufficiency* of Christ for our salvation. He is *all* we need. It was the same as he had said to the Samaritan woman at the well. His own sufficiency was why Jesus said, “Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away.” Let that be a word of comfort to you. Coming to Jesus means you are not left alone to be successful in your work of faith. He promised that you will not be disappointed.

He will not turn any away who come to him. He is sufficient for our needs. To what end? Eternal life. “This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.” To us that sounds consistent with what we know will happen; that is, just as Jesus was raised on that Easter Sunday morning, so he will raise us. Is there anyone or anything else that can do what Jesus is doing? No. However, to the ears of his listeners that day, it was completely foreign.

The narrative changed at this point. The introduction of the complaining Jews signaled a change, perhaps the move into the teaching in the synagogue. I am going to go through this rather quickly. You can go back and reflect on the detail – I encourage you to do that. Here, though, what I want you to hear is the audaciousness, the grandeur, the overwhelming scope of what Jesus declared.

John wrote, “The Jews began to complain about him.” Jesus was saying things they could not understand or accept. Their complaint centered around Jesus’ statement that he was “the bread from heaven.” From heaven? The Jews complained to each other, “What is he talking about? We know this is Jesus, the son of Joseph. We know his mother and father.” What is interesting was that when Jesus rebuked them, he did not rebuke their lack of understanding; rather, he rebuked their complaining. Complaining was functionally dismissing him; rejecting him. They were looking for reasons to dismiss him. They were refusing to hear what he was saying. That opened the door for some truly remarkable statements.

We tend to think of Jesus’ statement to the disciples on the night he was betrayed – in John 14 – as the clearest statement, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me.” However, look at what he said here, “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me.” Faith is a gift from God. “I will raise that person up on the last day.” As we are baptized into Christ’s death, so we are also baptized into His victory and His resurrection. “It was written by the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’” This quote came from Isaiah 54 which, at the risk of stating the obvious, followed Isaiah 53 – which was the prophesy of the suffering messiah that we read during Holy Week, as in

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by others;  
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;  
and as one from whom others hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities  
and carried our diseases;  
yet we accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have all turned to our own way,  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 54 followed with the promise of God's redeeming love. The consequence of the Suffering Servant's obedience would be that those who were afflicted would be part of the everlasting love and compassion of the LORD. Isaiah wrote, "In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer." (Isaiah 54:8) Through the work of the Suffering Servant, we are healed. Judgment has been rendered and we are made clean. Then, "My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you." (Isaiah 54:10) It was the promise of peace with God through the Suffering Servant. Finally, people redeemed by the Suffering Servant were promised, "All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the prosperity of your children." (Isaiah 54:13) That was what Jesus quoted. Jesus was revealing that He was the Suffering Servant who would redeem the children of Israel.

If that was not clear enough, he followed it up with, "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me." And, "Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life." These were defining statements. If you have heard and learned from God, you come to Jesus. If you believe in Jesus, you have eternal life. How was this different than what the Jews already believed?

It was all about the relationship, not compliance with the law. It was all about knowing God, not knowing *about* God.

"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." Yes, yes, yes, we get it...we know, but what do we do? The point is we cannot do until we know him. The doing is knowing him, drawing close to him, serving him, and trusting him. The doing is yielding to him – that is, holding fast to him when you disagree or do not want to agree. It is saying, "Not my will, but Thy will be done."

Oh, how the work of yielding puts us in conflict with the world around us – and, sadly, also with some other parts of the church. In our culture today – and sadly, in some of the church, the Bible is dismissed as irrelevant, contradictory, or outdated. The Jesus revealed in Scripture should be appreciated as an expression of God's love, but the blood sacrifice and atonement are not helpful in making us feel self-affirmed and fulfilled. In place of the God who has revealed himself in Scripture, Americans of all ages have adopted something dubbed "moralistic therapeutic deism." Many people in our culture have received as their understanding of what it means to be Christian:

1. A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.

2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.<sup>2</sup>

That is specifically *not* what Scripture teaches about Christ. You cannot read scripture and come to this view of God. The only way you get to this view is by ignorance of scripture, by explaining it away, by choosing to obey only which portions you like, or by not trusting it to be God's word. In this version we have created, there is no sin and no accounting for sin. In this version, God's purpose is to make us happy and anything short of our unbridled happiness means we are a victim due sympathy – rather than a sinner deserving condemnation.

In contrast, Jesus said here in John that eternal life existed only in him. We gather, we worship, we study, and we fellowship because Jesus is who he says in scripture; and, because Jesus is who he says, he is worthy of our attention and praise. We do all those things – gather, worship, study, and fellowship --because it is the work of faith. We *go* -- bearing witness and opening the gospel to Carson City and beyond – because of who Jesus is. We are not earning God's love, but rather are living into the love we have received in Christ. We are being molded and shaped into the creation God intended us to be.

The living water and the bread from heaven are the food of spirit and truth. Again, Jesus referred back to the manna, and pointed out, all those who ate the manna died. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

"Ewww," the Jews replied. Well, actually, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus was talking about the redemption of creation which would take place through his physical obedience to God. He would fulfill the entirety of the law through his obedience to God. The living water and the bread from heaven are the food of spirit and truth – the very fruit of the tree of life.

The explanation Jesus gave was straightforward. Without Jesus, there is no life. "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." By receiving Jesus and serving Jesus, there is eternal life. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them on the last day." Jesus was talking about a life of faith doing the work of believing in him.

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<sup>2</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, [\*Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers\*](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 163.

The eating and drinking of the *flesh* and *blood* of Jesus is clearly an act of faith (53). The metaphorical language can be understood only in the light of the coming sacrifice of Jesus. Dependence on what Jesus has done is, therefore, vividly described in terms of eating and drinking. The result of such dependence is seen in vs 56-57, in a mutual indwelling. Jesus' dwelling in believers means that he identifies himself with them, but their dwelling in him means that they continue to depend on him.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus said that "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them." Later he would use the Passover celebration with his disciples – the meal which remembered God's judgment on Egypt and the redemption of Israel – to institute the new covenant described in Isaiah. It is the meal that Jesus instituted that we repeat today in the Lord's supper. In this meal we celebrate Jesus' invitation to abide in him and to invite him to abide in us. We receive him as the bread of heaven redeeming us from bondage and slavery to sin and stand in the assured hope of eternal life with him.

So, as we approach this table together, let us remember who Jesus said he was: he is the living water, those who believe in him will never be thirsty; he is the bread from heaven, those who believe in him will never hunger and have eternal life. Take, eat; drink, all of you; and praise God.

Amen.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to "eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood"? What is the life he was describing?
2. Do you find yourself tempted to eat other food or drink other water? How do you respond to the "moralistic therapeutic deists" that you encounter?
3. How do you draw closer to Jesus? Is it comforting to know "anyone who comes to me I will never drive away"?

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Bible Commentary*, p. 1038.