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“I Am the Bread of Life”

(John 6:22-71)

“Prepping” has become a serious issue for many in our communities. In our own area the Derecho with its resulting power outages and the loss of water during the Elk River chemical spill have caused many to consider the importance of preparing for such emergencies. They spend a great deal of time and effort stocking up on food and other supplies that will last until needed. While it may indeed be important to prepare to care for our physical needs, it is vital that we consider preparing for our eternal, spiritual needs. Jesus made this clear when He said, “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life...” (John 6:27). He went on to explain how it was He Himself who provided this food that endures when He exclaimed to the people, “I am the Bread of Life”. Let us look at Jesus’ claim and consider how we might “prep” to meet our greatest need of all.

The Miracle

(At this point I would encourage you to take time to read the whole chapter of John 6)

The first part of John’s gospel is built around seven miracles or signs. These were performed as evidence that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Jesus’ claim to be “The Bread of Life” followed His miracle of feeding the five thousand with only five barley loaves and two small fish. This was the only miracle recorded in all four gospels. It likely involved the feeding of well over five thousand people as Matthew’s account informs us there were **“five thousand men, besides women and children” (14:21)**. While we do not have time to study this miracle in detail, it is important to note the people’s response. When they saw His ability to provide them food, they sought to make Him king. This miracle caused them to recognize Jesus could indeed possibly be their Messiah, but they only saw Him as a political leader who might provide their needs and deliver them from the Romans. John records that **“...When Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone. (6:15)** Jesus knew they did not understand His role as Savior, so He slipped away from them. The next day, the crowds sought Him out and found Him with His disciples on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. It is here that John records Jesus’ message giving the spiritual meaning behind the miracle.

The Message

Jesus first admonishes the crowd for seeking Him not out of any spiritual interest, but because He had given them food. He challenges them to not **“labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you...” (:27)** The crowd then asks a key question, **“What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” (:28)** Jesus reply is essential to our understanding: **“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” (:29)** The rest of Jesus’ message is actually an elaboration of this key statement, using His miracle and His claim to be the “bread of life” as an illustration.

Perhaps we should stop for a moment and consider the nature of the things for which we so often labor. In Jesus’ day the people may have been concerned about providing the basics of life, such as food and clothing. Most of us do not have to worry about these necessities. However, we pursue things that are just as perishable: wealth, success, position, and material things. Jesus’ words continue to challenge to us today to seek after the things that really matter!

As Jesus continues His teaching, He lays before the crowd His remarkable claim in 6:35:

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

As Jesus continued His message, He made some seemingly strange statements that caused great concern and confusion among His listeners:

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” (6:51)

Upon hearing this people quarreled and asked, **“How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”** Jesus’ response is even more disturbing to them:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. John 6:53-55

The Meaning

The problem the people had with Jesus’ message came about because they took His words literally. They were thinking in terms of literal, physical bread. Ultimately their problem was one of unbelief. They did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. They would not even consider the possibility that He was sent from God. Consequently, they could not grasp the spiritual meaning of His words. But what did Jesus mean when He claimed, “I am the bread of life”? As the “Bread of Life” Jesus is:

The Source of Eternal Life

The Source of that which Sustains Life

The Source of That which Truly Satisfies

A key to understanding this passage is to determine what Jesus meant when He said you must **“eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood”**. We must determine whether Jesus is speaking literally (as the crowd took Him to mean) or whether He was speaking figuratively, spiritually, and symbolically. Jesus is clearly using symbolic language when He proclaims “I am the bread which came down from heaven”, “I am the bread of Life”, and “I am the living bread”. Likewise, Jesus is using figurative language to illustrate His spiritual point when He speaks of “eating His flesh” and “drinking His blood”. The issue with which Jesus is dealing is how does one receive, or appropriate this life of which He speaks. One does so by believing in the Son of God! (Remember the key statement found in 6:29: **“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent”**.) Jesus deals with this throughout His entire message.

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (:40)

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. (:47)

...The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” (:63,64)

Just as we receive the physical life that is found in bread by eating, we receive the spiritual, eternal life that is found in Christ by believing in Him and coming to Him.

“This, then, is to feed upon Christ—to believe that which is revealed about him, and then to appropriate Him to yourself by personal faith.”

C.H. Spurgeon

Reaction to Jesus Message

As we noted in our previous study, throughout the Gospel of John there is a clear contrast between those who accepted and believed the message Christ proclaimed and those who did not. Christ proclaimed the necessity of each person to believe and place their faith in Him in terms that were difficult for them to accept, and we read of their reaction:

Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?”...From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. (vs. 60, 66)

Upon seeing this, Jesus asked His closest followers, **“Do you also want to go away?” (vs. 67)** Peter’s answer is vital, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (vs. 68-69)** Peter and the others had indeed “eaten” of Christ and appropriated eternal life by believing in Him and placing their faith in Him!

Conclusion

Have you received this “bread of life” that Jesus offers by believing in Him and placing your faith and trust in Him? Are you working for that which will endure forever?

As a believer are you daily “feeding on Christ” by maintaining a close relationship with Him and reading and studying the Word of God? This is particularly important during these hectic days of the regular session.

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays,

8:00 AM Governor’s Conference Room (Sec. of State’s Ofc)

12:00 Noon Treasurer’s Conference Room (EB54,

Basement of East Wing)