

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 15

John – Part Five

Discourse on the Bread of Life

John 6:25-71

I. BACKGROUND

We have done a basic overview of John. We have examined in more detail the miracles of Christ recorded in the gospel. We then looked at the early discourse where Jesus contrasted the new order of things with the old covenant explained through Moses. This week, we will examine Jesus' discourse on the bread of life recorded in John 6:25-71.

As we look at this discourse, we need to put it into context. Jesus has just fed 5,000 men with a few loaves and fishes. After that miracle, the people and the disciples left for Capernaum. Jesus came walking on the water to the disciples in the dead of night and was on shore in Capernaum the next morning.

When the people find Jesus on the Capernaum side of the lake, they naturally quizzed Jesus on his arrival time and circumstances. In this context, we have an interchange between Jesus and the multitude that illustrates many important lessons about the search for Jesus.

We will examine the interchange with the various points that John made along the way.

II. INTERCHANGE

- A. The interchange begins with the people seeking Jesus and information about him. The question for the people was about how and when Jesus arrived at Capernaum. Why did they seek him? Jesus makes it clear in verse 26, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me...because you ate the loaves and had your fill." In other words, these folks were seeking out Jesus for their own prosperity, for their own appetites and cravings, for what **THEY** would get from the relationship.

This type of seeking is not too different from what many do today. How many people are seeking out God to increase their own prosperity? One can watch on the television constant appeals of a prosperity gospel. The idea that one should embrace God and Jesus in order to thrive physically and economically in this life is not foreign to our culture. But, it is foreign to God's way of seeing things. Similarly, church was never intended as a place to go to set up a business or a business deal. It is not a political junket to be used to propel one further down a worldly passion. Jesus has a sharp word of instruction for those with these motives.

Jesus tells these folks that they need to "work for eternal life – the food that endures," rather than for "food that spoils." In other words, to those who seek God for their personal goals, they need to trade in that mission with a desire for God motivated from God's goals and purposes. The relationship is to be one centered on God's desires and plans, not ours.

- B.* In response to this statement, the people ask, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (28) This is a second approach to discovering Jesus. If we move past the first idea of seeking him out for our prosperity, then we might find ourselves asking how we should fit into the overall scheme and "carry our weight." Another way to put this idea is how do we justly do our part to get the eternal life Jesus said we should be seeking? God can do his part, but we want to do our fair share.

In Jesus' response, we note a very subtle change in the ending used on one key word. It is no accident how John writes of Jesus' response. This is one of those key passages in scripture worthy of inscribing on our brains in big, bold letters. Jesus changes the question by his answer. Whereas the people said, "What must **WE** do to do the **WORKS** God requires?" Jesus answers, "The **WORK** of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (29).

Notice the change from the plural to singular? The people were thinking about working to please God and merit his attention and favor. Jesus wants to correct their thinking. Jesus wants the people to realize that no one does works (plural) to please God. The work (singular) that brings one into favor and eternal life with God is faith in Christ. Period.

- C. Next is a third seeking attitude: Show me a miracle! Earn my devotion and trust. Convince me that Jesus is God's answer to my problems. The people go a step further. They remind Jesus that Moses did not expect a following without providing manna in the desert. Interestingly, in this sense, Jesus does not refuse to answer this demand for a sign. We would almost expect Jesus to tell them that he just fed 5,000 men with a few fishes and loaves just the day before. Instead, Jesus first corrects their theology and then explains the sign.

The theology correction from Jesus comes from the people's misunderstanding that Moses gave them manna. As Jesus explains, God gave them manna, not Moses. The manna came from heaven, not Moses' workshop! Jesus then explains the real sign in which the people should be interested. Jesus tells the people that God gives the people something beyond manna that lasted a day and fed Jews in the wilderness 1,500 years earlier. God is giving the people of the world Jesus, a bread of Life, a true bread. Jesus feeds not just a few Jews in history, but all who would choose to partake of him worldwide.

- D. When Jesus explains that this life giving bread is available to the world, the people ask Jesus for the bread. They do not realize that Jesus himself is the bread, the sustenance for the people. They are far from understanding that God is in the act of providing Jesus as the answer for mankind. So, the people again seek a physical answer for their predicament. They ask Jesus, "from now on give us this bread" (34). If Jesus had given them an unending loaf of bread, then they thought they would be happy for life.

Jesus explains in very blunt terms what he has been talking about. Unlike the Jews who are concerned with the shallow things of earthly possessions, Jesus tells them:

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. (35)

Jesus explains this to a people that still do not understand. Jesus even adds that Jesus did not come to be an unending loaf of bread. Jesus' work in this endeavor is not to try and satisfy the growling appetites or earthly desires of the listeners. Rather, Jesus has come to earth as the bread of life to fulfill the will of God. And, the will of God is that all who God draws to Jesus will find Jesus, not be lost by Jesus, and will be raised up at the last day by Jesus.

E. When Jesus offers this explanation to the people with a personal acclamation that Jesus is the bread that came from heaven, the people show they don't think nearly as highly of Jesus as they ought. Rather than appreciate the truth of what Jesus is saying, the people note, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say 'I came down from heaven?'" (42) In other words, as the people hear about Jesus and decide Jesus is not what they wanted or expected, the people find it easier to write Jesus off as not what he was cracked up to be! Again, John must surely have thought about the people along the way of his ministry who rejected Jesus simply on the principle that Jesus was not what they wanted him to be...without concern over whether they were what Jesus wanted them to be!

F. This gives us another interesting and very contemporary response of the people seeking Jesus. They begin to grumble! Many were finding that Jesus is not fitting into their mold, doing what they want, how they want, and as a result, they grumble about him and his work.

To these people, Jesus says, "stop grumbling!" (43) Jesus then walks through it again, explaining that God calls those to him, that Jesus keeps them and will raise them up. Jesus further reiterates that the forefathers that ate the manna in the desert all died, but that anyone who partakes (eats) of Jesus as the bread of heaven will not die but will live forever (51).

At this point, the grumbling of the Jews leads to arguments. They see the statements of Jesus as cannibalistic. Jesus tries to remedy this misunderstanding with another recitation of the fact that God has sent him, but the offensiveness of the analogy does not leave his disciples. John explains to us that many of them quit following Jesus at that point.

The twelve stayed with Jesus. Peter's reason for doing so was that Jesus had "the words of eternal life" (68). Further, Peter confesses, "We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." This attitude – this confession – brings us full circle.

Those who seek Jesus for prosperity, those who seek Jesus through personal merit, those who will accept Jesus once they see the sign of their own choosing, those who believe Jesus is not what he's cracked up to be – those people are missing on the answer to all of life's questions. Those people are missing the Jesus who is God's answer, who is God's nourishment, who is God's salvation.

III. POINTS FOR HOME

1. Seek Jesus.
2. For who he is.
3. With pure motives.
4. Of finding your place in God's plan.
5. Don't grumble.
6. Don't object to God's way.
7. Make Jesus your life.