

**THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part twenty-five**

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**JESUS' SERMON ON THE THREE KEY QUESTIONS OF RELIGION**

**John 6:22-35** - "On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. [23] Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. [24] So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. [25] When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" [26] Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. [27] Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." [28] Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" [29] Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." [30] So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? [31] Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " [32] Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. [33] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." [34] They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." [35] Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

Chapter six records Jesus' most extensive teaching on Himself as the bread of life, broken for mankind. This is John's unique approach to the meaning of the cross and Christ's redemptive death. John's is the only gospel totally omitting any account of what we have come to call the "Last Supper." But he more than compensates for this omission by providing by far the most rich and extensive record of Jesus' own remarks regarding the theology of His own death.

Before the theology John notes that the strange disappearance of Jesus hadn't gone unnoticed by the crowd wanting to crown Him as their king the day before after the feeding of the 5000 - **Verses 22-25** - "On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. [23] Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. [24] So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. [25] When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

There had only been one boat on the shore that day near Tiberias, the place where Jesus had fed the 5000. And when the crowd saw the disciples leave in that boat Jesus wasn't on board (22). John makes nothing of the fact that those who eventually found Jesus across the lake asked Him only *when* He had gotten there, rather than *how* He had gotten there, which I would have thought was the obvious question. But John has bigger things on his mind.

Chapter six is one very involved chapter to study. So here's how I'm approaching today's passage. I'm threading our text together by three questions asked of Jesus and His expanded response to each. We'll break down the outline of this text under the three issues these questions draw out of Jesus:

**Question #1 - What should human beings seek most and work hardest for in life and why?(6:25-27).**

**Question #2 - What should we be doing to please God - to do the works of God?(28-29).**

**Question #3 - What is so special about Jesus that He alone is the center of God's redemptive will for mankind?(30-35).**

1) **QUESTION #1 - WHAT SHOULD HUMAN BEINGS SEEK MOST AND WORK HARDEST FOR IN LIFE AND WHY?**

**John 6:25-27** - "When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" [26] Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. [27] Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."

Jesus wastes no time here. Our world - and yes, our religious world - is impressed enough with the gathering of a good crowd. Surely it's enough that the people *come* to seek out Jesus. Jesus should be flattered. This *must* be better than the

people **not** coming. Jesus is lucky to have the crowds following Him, and at great effort, we might add.

But the very first words out of Jesus' mouth - the first **very blunt, unflattering** words - are not so much about **who** came, or **how many** came, but **why** they came. This was so important to Jesus there was no little story or parabolic lead in. He doesn't open with any politically correct chit-chat. None of that.

And the reason is Jesus knows nothing else matters until this issue is honestly addressed and exposed. Nothing good can happen when people come - even in great, enthusiastic numbers - with self-serving motives.

I think John means for us to linger over this picture of the motive-probing Jesus. We're meant to see Him standing in His church today. He greets His people, not with a bulletin and a hug, but with a question, **"Why are you here? Why did you come today? What motivates your religious devotion?"**

And what Jesus pinpoints in our text is the fact that people can be outwardly drawn to Him for reasons less noble than they would like to admit. We can come to Jesus with pious looking hearts, appearing to love **Jesus**, all the while being incredibly **self-seeking**.

Remember, these people had literally **crossed the sea** to get to Jesus. They had seen Him multiply the loaves. And the **bread** was a **sign** pointing to Christ. Only these people had it all backwards. Instead of seeing the **bread** as a **sign** leading them to love **Christ**, they had witnessed a **sign** resulting in **bread** and fell in love with **full stomachs**. And there's a whole spiritual world between loving Jesus as Lord and loving a satisfied, full stomach.

Now, Jesus sees they're missing it badly. Because they were still relishing the **bread** Jesus had supplied His sermon develops around the image of food and hunger - **John 6:27** - **"Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."**

Jesus begins His lesson with a truth everyone understands. Physical food doesn't permanently eliminate hunger - **"Do not labor for food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life...."** Only Jesus isn't just talking about physical food. He's using physical food - like the bread these people were focused on - as a picture of **misdirected ambitions and pursuits**.

The only way to understand Jesus' point is to hold the thoughts of **verses 26 and 27** together - **"Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. [27] Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."**

True, they were coming to Jesus. They were seeking Him out. But they were coming to Him in the same way they pursued everything else in life. What I mean is their **goals** were the same in pursuing Jesus as they were in pursuing wealth or food or personal pleasure. That's why Jesus links up their **seeking Him out** with the way they **sought out physical food**.

What I'm saying is they were coming to Jesus, all right. But they were coming to Him, not out of devotion to Jesus as Lord, but out of devotion to their own self-centered desires. They were **using** Jesus, not **servicing** Jesus.

"You're **seeking me** because you got bread for your stomachs" (26). "Don't be working (don't labor) just for stuff that fills your stomach (or closet, or garage, or stock portfolio)" (27). "If you're going to find coming to me a fruitful experience you have to orient your whole heart toward **eternal realities**. You won't **value me properly** if you are thronging around me because of physical bread or healing or prosperity or the fulfillment of all your wildest self-centered dreams."

This is how Jesus starts His sermon. When we come to terms with the real Jesus we're on the edge of eternity. His words couldn't be clearer - **John 6:27** - **"Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."**

Allow Jesus to expand your desires. Plead for Him to refocus your life. Don't make your worship a tool for this-worldly fulfillment. Let the Messiah make the inside of your heart bigger than the advertisers and bankers and entertainers can make it. Turn to the real Jesus by turning away from your small pursuits. **He can't possibly make His divine grace as small as your present ambitions**. And remember, that emptiness you might now be feeling in your present life may well be the

very first preparatory step of His divine expansion of your heart. He's making the perishing candy of this world start to seem tasteless.

There's one more tricky issue in our text under this first point. It's in **6:27** and it needs an honest look - "**Do not labor for the food that perishes, but (labor) for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.**"

The first part of the verse doesn't seem to fit with the last part. Clearly we're told to **labor** (that's the verb) for eternal food rather than food that perishes. Then, in the last part we're told that this same enduring food is the food "**which the Son of Man will give to you....**" And we want to ask, "**Which is it? Do we labor? Or is it given?**"

And the answer seems to be "**Yes.**" The truth is, this is the easiest and the hardest thing to do at the very same time. No one has to **earn** eternal, unperishable life. We are clearly told the Son of man **gives** this life with incredible, lavish, undeserved freeness. No one qualifies for it.

But make no mistake, there is still incredible labor involved. The labor isn't labor to earn eternal life. The labor is the labor to **stop searching for our own self-fulfillment on our own terms**. Grace is free when we finally welcome it. Turning off pride and stubbornness is hard work.

## 2) **QUESTION #2 - WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING TO PLEASE GOD - TO DO THE WORKS OF GOD?**

**John 6:28-29** - "**Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?' [29] Jesus answered them, This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.**"

This is the question the whole religious world asks. What does it take to make God happy with us? What is He after? And the question clearly reveals their approach. Everything hinges on what **they** do.

People have a lot of ideas about what they must do. Quit gambling. Turn off internet porn. Stop lying. Put an end to that affair. Give more to the poor. Go to church - maybe even on Sunday night! But for sure, we've got to do something. We'll never make it the way we are now.

Please notice the way Jesus makes three important changes to the wording of their question. Words matter greatly. And Jesus knew just where they had used the wrong ones:

First, Jesus changed the **subject** of their sentence. "**What must we do so that we can be doing the works of God?**" (28). Jesus' answer - "**This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent**" (29).

This is Jesus' message to both the **humanitarian moralist** and the **religious inclusive pluralist**. The one thing central in the pleasure of God is the unique central redemptive work accomplished by Jesus Christ and the exclusive conscious commitment of trust in that work, and **only** that work, on the part of the religious follower. Jesus makes it clear that I can't please God at all if I put any other center of religious attention or effort **in the place of** God the Son, Jesus Christ.

To make this point even more rigorously Jesus makes a second change to the **object** of their question. "**Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?'" (28). The object of their question is **plural** - "**works**" - "**Where's the list. What are the things we need to get done**" Jesus' answer is **singular** - "**Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'**"**

Pleasing God is **profound**, but not **complex**. It involves only one life-transforming principle. One must place complete trust in Jesus Christ. One must believe everything Jesus said about Himself. One must lean into Christ to produce a grateful love for Christ. The effects of this trust are ongoing and fruit-producing throughout eternity. But the choice is simple and singular. All who would do the work that pleases our Creator God must give honoring trust to His only Son.

To make this point even richer Jesus makes a third, final change to their question. Jesus changes the **verb** they bring to Him: "**Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?'" (28). The assumed emphasis is all on their **doing**. They assume their own momentum of outward work and accomplishment. Jesus changes the verb completely: "**Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent'" (29).****

And this, of course, leads to the third question they brought to Jesus:

3) **QUESTION #3 - WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT JESUS THAT HE ALONE IS THE CENTER OF GOD'S SAVING WILL FOR MANKIND?**

**John 6:30-35** - "So they said to him, 'Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? [31] Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " [32] Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. [33] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." [34] They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." [35] Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

It's not accidental that immediately upon hearing Jesus talk about the need to ***"believe in him whom the father has sent"*** (29), they people immediately ask why they ***should*** place such unique trust in Jesus. ***"Give us a sign. Give us a reason to believe in you!"*** (30).

And then they go on to make the same mistaken that every follower of all other religions will ***always*** make when they look at Jesus. These Jewish followers immediately proceed to compare Jesus with other religious prophets and leaders. In this case they put Jesus on the level of Moses.

Moses led them through the wilderness for forty years. Moses fed them with manna from heaven. ***"That's*** what Moses did. What do ***you*** do that we should believe in you? Why should we switch?"

And Jesus' answer is so profound and easily missed. He carefully tells them - ***corrects them*** - by reminding them ***Moses*** didn't feed anybody. Watch the exchange again carefully in **John 6:32-34** - "Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, ***it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.*** [33] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'" [34] They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

There's a lot here, but the closing point I want to make is the strange way Jesus finishes His response to this Jewish crowd. First, it wasn't Moses who produced that manna. Moses was a great leader, to be sure, but he was just a mortal man. God sends manna, not Moses.

All of which is true enough, but it's not quite the way Jesus finishes that sentence. He doesn't say, ***"It wasn't Moses who gave that manna. It was God."*** No. He twists the sentence around - **John 6:32** - "Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, ***but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven***"

And what Jesus means is the comparison between Himself and Moses is different from what these Jews imagine. He's telling them - and us - that what God did for a single race of people (Jews) for a limited time (forty years) with a certain food (physical manna) He was now doing eternally for the whole world through the true bread of life, Jesus Christ.

That manna in the wilderness left people hungry and grumbling about the food in no time flat. But those who come to Jesus Christ and fill their souls on the strength of His grace through ongoing trust and humility and faith will find what only He can provide. Eternal life.

Don't labor for food that perishes. You can't hold on to it or the fleeting joy it brings. Be eternally satisfied in Christ alone.