“I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE” PART 1

John 'Chapter 6 is a long chapter, 71 verses long. It contains several parts including a couple of Jesus' miracles (we looked at one of them last week), Jesus' teachings and dialogue He has with His disciples. There are a lot of things going on in this chapter. If we're not careful we'll have a tendency to break John 6 up into smaller pieces in order to study it and, when we do, there is the possibility that we miss the main truth revealed in this Chapter. And here it is: this chapter contrasts those who truly are Jesus’ disciples and those who are not really His disciples. I think this will become clearer as we go thru the text today.

When we left off last week the crowd of people wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him their king. But Jesus withdrew and He went off by Himself. That is not why He came. That wasn't His mission. At the end of v 15 we see that Jesus is quite popular with the people of Galilee, and for good reason. The miracles that He has been performing are incredible: the sick are being healed, the dead are being raised, the blind are given sight, the deaf now hear, demon possessed people are delivered. Then there’s the miracle we looked at last week, the feeding of the 5000 men (which means 10,000 to 20,000 people if you include women and children). What Jesus did that afternoon on the NE side of the Sea of Galilee was so astounding that all 4 gospel accounts include it. [Describe what happened]

So, at this point, Jesus is at the height of His popularity. However, I want you to notice something – by the time you get to the end of John Chapter 6 you read these words, v 66: “After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him.” The word “disciples” here is the Greek word “*mathetes*,” which means “a learner.” It's a very general word describing someone who follows another in order to learn from them. This was a common practice in Jesus day when people would follow the various rabbis and sit under their teaching and learn from them, be their disciple. But never would rabbis have tens of thousands of people following them like Jesus did! The crowds flock to Jesus because they are intrigued by Him. They listen intently to His teachings. They interact and ask Him questions. So in a real general sense John calls them "disciples." Primarily, though, and John points this out several times, they are intrigued by Jesus miracles. At the end of Chapter 6 these so-called disciples will abandon Jesus. They will walk away. They will stop following Him. Here’s what you need to understand: they are not really His disciples. Verse 64 says that “Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray Him.” Back in John Chapter 2 we noticed a similar statement: “Many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing. But Jesus on His part did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people.” So I want you to keep this in mind as we go thru our passage this morning, beginning with verse 16…

READ John 6:16-21

This same event is recorded in Mark 6 and in Matthew 14 and they offer more details. Evening comes. Jesus dismisses the crowd. He sends His 12 disciple on ahead while He goes up to the mountain to be alone and pray. The 12 get into their boat and head toward Bethsaida, which is about 3 miles away (Mark’s acct). Presumably Jesus will join up with them there. Their ultimate destination that evening is their home town, Jesus’ home base of Capernaum. The winds pick up. The waves become rough. The boat “was beaten by the waves for the wind was against them” (Matthew’s acct). The disciples struggle to make any progress. There’s no record that they ever make it to Bethsaida. From evening until the 4th watch of the night (about 3-6 am, Matthew’s and Mark’s accts), in a 9- to 12-hour period of time the disciples, many of them seasoned fishermen, row about 3-4 miles. Jesus notices that they’re struggling and He makes His way out to meet them, walking on the water. It’s early morning and still dark. When His disciples see Jesus they are frightened thinking He is a ghost (Matthew’s acct). Jesus tells them, “It is I. Do not be afraid.” At that point Matthew’s acct tells us that Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water toward Jesus. He loses faith, begins to sink and cries out, “Lord, save mel” Jesus reaches out His hand, pulls Peter up and they both walk on the water back to the boat and get in. Matthew tells us that “when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat (His 12 disciples) worship Him saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’” It is interesting to note that the first time Jesus calmed the storm the disciples had said, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey Him?” This time they recognize Who Jesus is – the Son of God – and they worship Him. Point number 1 – True disciples worship Jesus for Who He is. Not for what He does, not for what He promises, not for what we can get from Him, but for Who He is.

John's acct tells us that immediately the boat was at the land, at Capernaum. So the disciples witness 3 more miracles that night – they see Jesus and Peter walk on the water; the winds suddenly cease when Jesus gets into the boat; and then there is that supernatural transporting of their boat from the middle of the lake to their home port. Mark's acct tells us that the 12 disciples did not understand about the miracle of Jesus feeding of the large crowd the day before. But apparently neither did the thousands of people who had witnessed it. Look at the next verses...

READ John 6:22-24

The large crowd (the same one that Jesus had fed the day before) remains all night in the same place on the NE side of the Sea of Galilee. They had seen His disciples leave in a boat, but Jesus had not been with them. So they assume that Jesus is still somewhere in that area. We know from reading on in this passage why it is they stayed – they wanted Him to feed them breakfast. They wanted Him to provide them another meal. Word of this incredible miracle apparently makes its way to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, to Tiberias, on the SW side of the lake. Now boats from Tiberias have made their way to this location. They want in on the action. They want free food too. At some point the crowds realize that Jesus isn't there. So they travel together to Capemaum on a flotilla of small boats. Why Capemaum? Because they know that's the disciple's and Jesus' home base. They figure that must be where they are. The end of v 24 says that they “went to Capemaum, seeking Jesus.” Why are they seeking Jesus? Let's read on...

READ John 6:25

Jesus doesn't answer their question. He doesn't go through the whole account we just covered about the events of the night before. He knows their hearts. He knows why they're really there.

READ John 6:26-29

This large crowd enters into a dialog with Jesus. We know from v 59 that this takes place in the synagogue at Capernaum. Remember, Jesus knows their hearts, their motives. They are seeking physical food. They know that Jesus can provide it because they had witnessed it the day before. So Jesus calls them out. He rebukes them. They have already acknowledge that they believe Jesus could be the Messiah, the Prophet that Moses talked about in Deuteronomy 18:15. But there are two aspects to the Messiah's mission – a physical aspect, yes, but also a spiritual. The Messiah will have a physical rule and reign. He will bring healing and provide material blessings. But there is a spiritual aspect to the Messiah, which Jesus stresses here and that is the spiritual food that endures to eternal life. What's Jesus talking about? He's talking about salvation. And how do we obtain this eternal life? From the Son of Man. From Jesus. Jesus Himself is the means by which we obtain salvation. That's why Jesus came, as Luke's gospel says, “to seek and to save the lost.” On Jesus “God the Father has set His seal.” The Father has authorized and authenticated the Son, Jesus, to be the Giver of eternal life. Jesus was not merely the Giver of physical food which sustains temporarily, but He is the Giver of spiritual food. Later Jesus will tell the crowd, “Whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.” Jesus admonishes these supposed followers of His to focus on the spiritual rather than the physical.

“OK, Jesus, what do we have to do in order to earn this eternal life that You are talking about?” Remember these are Jews. Their whole religious life is centered on keeping the law, doing good works, trying to please God. Jesus says the one work (notice Jesus says that it is the work of GOD rather than man's work for God), the one thing they must do is, “Believe in Him whom He has sent.” In other words in order to receive eternal life a person must believe in the One that God the Father has sent. And Who is that, according to Jesus? Himself. He, Jesus is the One sent by the Father. He is THE source of eternal life. That's been Jesus' message all along. It's what He told the woman at the well. It's what He told Nicodemus. It's what He told His disciples. And now He delivers that same message to this crowd packed inside the synagogue at Capernaum.

Well, what's their reaction to this message? READ John 6:30-34

In essence the people are saying, “What sign can you give us to prove that you really are who you say you are?” I find that astonishing! Jesus had just the day before, less than 24 hours ago, performed an amazing sign which validated who He is. He showed that He was God. He literally created food from nothing. These same people had witnessed this firsthand and yet here they are, in essence, saying, “Prove it to us!” This crowd's heart is hard. You see, Jesus has just told them that He is the means to eternal life. Believe in Him and you will be saved. His words, His teachings are the means to salvation. His miracles, which they are focused on, were done to validate Jesus' claim.

The crowd basically downplays Jesus' miracle from the day before. “Moses provided manna from heaven every day for millions of people. You do something like that, you feed us every day, and maybe then we'll believe you.”

But Jesus reminds them it wasn't Moses who provided the bread from heaven. Who was it? It was God. Exodus 16 says that the Lord rained down bread from heaven. So Jesus tells them, “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.” It was God who provided the manna, the bread from heaven, which temporarily satisfied the people of Israel in the wilderness. But all who ate of it, including Moses, eventually died. Jesus then says that it is also God who provides the true bread from heaven, the bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world, not just Israel. Of course, Jesus is talking about Himself and will begin His “I am the bread of life” discourse next. But at the time He said this they are still thinking in physical terms only. V 34, "Sir, give us this bread always." "We want you tofeed us every day like you did yesterday!"

It is in response to this hard hearted group’s focus on the physical only that Jesus gives His “I am the bread of life” discourse beginning in verse 35 and running all the way thru verse 58. We’ll cover that next week.

Application – so what sort of disciple are you? Do you follow Jesus Christ for what He can give you, for health, wealth, comfort, physical needs, etc OR do you follow Jesus Christ for Who He is?