“I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE” PART 2

In John Chapter 6 there are two groups of people identified as Jesus’ “disciples.” Of course you have the smaller group made up of 12 men who Jesus called and they followed Him. But then you have a much larger group made up of thousands of people who are following Jesus around Galilee because they saw the signs that Jesus was doing on the sick. Both of these groups are referred to as “disciples.” In this chapter, however, we see a contrast between them. It is this contrast that shows us who is really a disciple, a true follower, of Jesus Christ and who is not.

As Chapter 6 opens a large crowd of people seeks after and then finds Jesus. They’re drawn to Jesus primarily because of His miracles. It’s on this occasion, when this large crowd has journeyed out to see Jesus that He performs a most amazing miracle. With only 5 barley loaves and two fish, Jesus feeds this crowd, estimated to be between 10,000 and 20,000 people. He not only feeds all of them but the people eat until they are filled. And then Jesus’ disciples, the 12, pick up the leftovers – 12 baskets full! Incredible! Thousands of people witness this miracle and actually participate in it. This miracle demonstrates Jesus’ divine nature because it is a creative miracle. In Chapter 1, John says that Jesus is the Creator, the One who created the world. And in this miracle Jesus creates food from nothing. Only God can do that. So, by performing this miracle Jesus shows that He really is God!

Well after this miracle the crowd of people tries to take Jesus by force and make Him king. But this is not why Jesus came. So Jesus withdraws into the mountains by Himself to pray. He sends His disciples on ahead in their boat and later in the early morning hours while it’s still dark He comes walking to them on the water… Peter incident… they get back into the boat and the winds cease. Matthew’s account tells us that the 12 disciples worship Jesus and declare to Him, “Truly you are the Son of God.” This group of disciples, even though they don’t fully understand everything yet, having witnessed His miracles and heard His words, they believe He is who He claims to be – the Son of God – and they worship Him. These are truly Jesus’ disciples – why? Because they believe.

By contrast, the other group, the large crowd of so-called disciples that has been following Jesus around Galilee, well, let’s just say that what they want from Jesus is more food. They travel to Capernaum seeking Jesus because they want another meal. The bottom line is that they are following Jesus for what they can get from Him.

Jesus begins to teach the crowd. The previous day they had correctly identified Jesus as being the Prophet that Moses talked about in Deut. 18:15. In other words, Jesus IS the Messiah. However their idea of the Messiah was a bit off. If you read O.T. prophecy, the Messiah’s mission would have both a physical aspect and a spiritual one. Yes, the Messiah would have an earthly rule and reign someday from Mount Zion, from Jerusalem. Yes, the Messiah would bring physical healing, raise the dead, etc. and provide material blessings. But the Messiah would also bring salvation to the world. So, as Jesus teaches the crowd of people inside the synagogue at Capernaum, He emphasizes that He, the Son of Man is the source of eternal life. He, Jesus, is the One on Whom “God the Father has set His seal.” He has been authorized and authenticated by His Father to be the Giver of eternal life – not just the Giver of physical food that sustains for a short while, but the Giver of spiritual food, which is eternal. But the people don’t grasp Jesus’ message. Their focus is on the physical food that Jesus had provided them the day before, not on the spiritual food that Jesus is promising them that will lead to eternal life.

READ John 6:30-34

This same group of people who had witnessed firsthand Jesus incredible miracle the day before are now, in essence, telling Jesus, “Prove Who You say You are to us! Give us a sign!” This crowd’s heart is hard. Jesus has just told them that He is the means to eternal life. If they will believe in Him, then they will be saved. But they don’t believe Him. They downplay Jesus’ miracle from the day before. “Moses provided manna from heaven every day for millions of people. You do something like that, Jesus, you feed us every day, and then, maybe, we’ll believe you.”

Of course Jesus reminds them that it was NOT Moses who provided the bread from heaven, but it was God. “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.” It was God who provided the manna. Exodus 17 said that it was the Lord who rained down bread from heaven. That bread had a purpose. It sustained the people of Israel while they were in the wilderness. But it was only temporary. And the fact is that and all who ate it, including Moses, eventually died. Jesus then says that God is also the One who provides the TRUE bread from heaven, the bread which comes down from heaven and gives life, eternal life. And this bread is not just for Israel, but for the whole world. Of course, the bread from heaven that Jesus speaks of is Himself. To which the crowd responds, “Sir, give us this bread always.” They don’t get it. They’re still thinking physical bread! [this reminds me of the woman at the well, Jn 4]

In response to the crowd’s confusion or ignorance, Jesus delivers His “I am the bread of life” discourse. That begins in v 35 and runs all the way thru v 58 (with a little bit of dialogue between the people and Jesus).

I’m going to read the entire discourse to you and then we’ll look at it in detail. READ John 6:35-59

This is a long discourse about salvation – how to have eternal life. Jesus uses a metaphor of bread to describe Himself. “I am the bread of life…” By the way this is the first of 7 “I AMs” (the name of God) that Jesus will use in John’s gospel to explain something about His nature and work. In this teaching Jesus mentions God’s provision of the bread. He also talks about the human appropriation of the bread. Both God’s sovereignty and human free agency are at work in the process of salvation.

Let’s talk first about God’s part, what He does, His provision of the bread…

First Jesus says repeatedly that He came down out of heaven – v 32, 33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58

Jesus has made this claim before. When He was talking to Nicodemus He said, “No one has ascended into heaven except He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.” So, what does this mean? Why is this significant? It means that Jesus is divinely pre-existent. He wasn’t a created being. He didn’t begin as a baby born in Bethlehem at Christmas. He’s God. He’s always existed. That’s the essence of what John Chapter 1 is saying. “He was in the beginning with God” (1:2). So this bread is eternal because it is divinely pre-existent.

The next thing we need to see about this bread is God’s purpose, His plan… The bread, Jesus, came down from heaven because His Father had a plan – v 32, 33, 38, 39, 40, 57

So the Father sends the Son down from heaven on a divine mission, to accomplish His purpose – v 37, 39, 40, 44, 45

“Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons thru Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will” (Eph 1:4-5). So God chose them, gives them, draws them, receives them, keeps them, secures them and, finally, “on the last day,” Jesus Himself gathers them. This speaks of a physical resurrection to eternal life. “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (10:29).

I need to make a comment at this point. People do not come to God because of the powerful sway of preachers, or the clever argument of Bible teachers or thru human reasoning. People come to God by the drawing of the Holy Spirit.

So God had a purpose. In His perfect time He sent His Son. The Son came down to earth to accomplish the Father’s purpose, the redemption of the elect. And when the bread came down from heaven what did He do? V 33, He “gives life to the world.” That word life is “zoe” and refers to spiritual life. Jesus came to give eternal life. He’s the “living bread” (v 51), He’s the true bread (v 32). He is the bread of life.

Now let me talk about the human appropriation of the bread. There is something that we human beings must do in order to be saved. God initiates the salvation process, but we are also involved. V 35 “whoever comes to Me shall not hunger,” v 35 “whoever believes in Me shall never thirst,” v 40 “everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life,” v 47 “whoever believes has eternal life.”

The message to the lost world is this: Come to Jesus, see Jesus (gaze at Him, scrutinize Him, look carefully at Him) and then believe in Him. The whole purpose for John writing His gospel is summarized in 20:31: “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” So it’s about believing in Jesus.

OK, believing in what exactly? Two basic things: (1) that Jesus is the living bread, the Son of God, and the source of eternal life; but also – and this was what was a stumbling block to the Jews (and even for His true disciples at first) – (2) that Jesus’ death on the cross, His sacrifice was made for you, for your sins. When Jesus mentions eating His flesh and drinking His blood He’s talking about His death (still future at this point). He’s following thru on the whole bread metaphor. In order for bread to do you any good, you have to eat it. Just looking at it and admiring it and having a warm feeling about it won’t do you a bit of good. You have to eat it. But the Jews didn’t grasp the whole metaphor so they took Jesus literally and had a problem with it. Remember, Jews were prohibited by the Law from drinking blood (Lev 17, Deut 12, Deut 15). And then the whole idea of a dying Messiah? That’s not the kind of Messiah they were looking for. And so they left. They stopped following Jesus.

READ John 6:60-69

What separates a true disciple from a false disciple is the matter of belief. Some believed Jesus’ words and remained with Him even though they didn’t totally understand everything. Many, however left.

Application, so what kind of a disciple are you? SING--