

Christ, the Bread of Life

The Lord Jesus Christ is the bread of life. John 6 is a long sustained narrative opening with Jesus on a mountainside on the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus saw the crowd coming up, he asked Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" John 6:5. Philip answered that eight month's wages would not buy enough for each one to have a bite. Andrew spoke up saying that a boy had five small barley loaves and two small fishes. "But how far will they go among so many?" Andrew asked. Having seated the people (about 5,000 of them), Jesus took the loaves and the fishes and distributed to the 5,000 as much as they wanted. When they gathered the leftover bread, there were twelve baskets of pieces.

Responses to Jesus' Miracle of the Fish and the Loaves

The response of the people. In response the people, whom Jesus fed, said, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Chapter 6, verse 15, tells that Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain. From this early example, it is evident that Jesus did not intend to be an earthly, physical king. He avoided the idea of an earthly kingdom from the beginning. He taught in John 8:23, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world." Later, he taught in John 18:36-37, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." From the beginning, Jesus taught that neither he nor his kingdom was of this world. They were spiritual in nature and purpose.

The next day following his walking on the water, they were seeking Jesus. He said that they were looking for him because of the loaves. His response showed once again the spiritual nature of Christ and his kingdom. He said in chapter 6, verse 27, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." The true food is spiritual food, nurturing eternal not physical life.

They then asked, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

In verse 30 they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? 31 Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Their response is completely material. Jesus' answer forever separates him from the materialism sought by the Jews. He established the spiritual nature of the bread of life. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who 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." John 6:32-33. Jesus is the bread of life and that life is eternal.

Their next response shows their desire for the bread of life, but a lack of understanding still. "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

In John 6:35-40, Jesus declared with certainty the spiritual meaning of the "bread of life:"

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. 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. . . . 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

The response of the Jews. Upon hearing about the bread of life and eternal life, the Jews began to grumble about him, forcing a material meaning on his nature and his work.

At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" John 6:41-42.

In John 6:44-47, Jesus answers their grumbling in a statement of such certainty and clarity that one can

hardly miss the point:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God." Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.

Jesus Reiterates His Teaching

Jesus explains his spiritual nature and the eternal life he gives once again to the Jews in verses 47-51:

He who believes has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Once again, the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus answered by forecasting our need to partake fully of him to be saved. Both the symbolic eating his body and drinking his blood in the emblems of bread and fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper and our becoming in him in our daily lives fulfill this meaning. We partake of him, we become him, and he becomes us: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Cor 5: 17.

With the eating and drinking figure, Jesus once again repeats his teaching in John 6:53-58:

I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.

On hearing it, many of his disciples responded, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Later the record shows that from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. Yet, Peter and the twelve stood firm with the Lord:

67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Conclusion

We sing the song *Break Thou the Bread of Life*:

Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me,
As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea;
Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord;
My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word!

Bless Thou the truth, dear Lord, to me, to me,
As Thou didst bless the bread by Galilee;
Then shall all bondage cease, all fetters fall;
And I shall find my peace, my all in all.

Thou art the bread of life, O Lord, to me,
Thy holy Word the truth that saveth me;
Give me to eat and live with Thee above;
Teach me to love Thy truth, for Thou art love.

O send Thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me,
That He may touch my eyes, and make me see:
Show me the truth concealed within Thy Word,
And in Thy Book revealed I see the Lord.

Study Questions

Compare Moses, manna and the Israelites with Christ, the bread of life, and his disciples. _____

What will happen to those who feed on the bread of life? _____

What happens when people are taught of God? _____

What kind of food were the Jews looking for? What happened when Christ did not offer it to them? _____