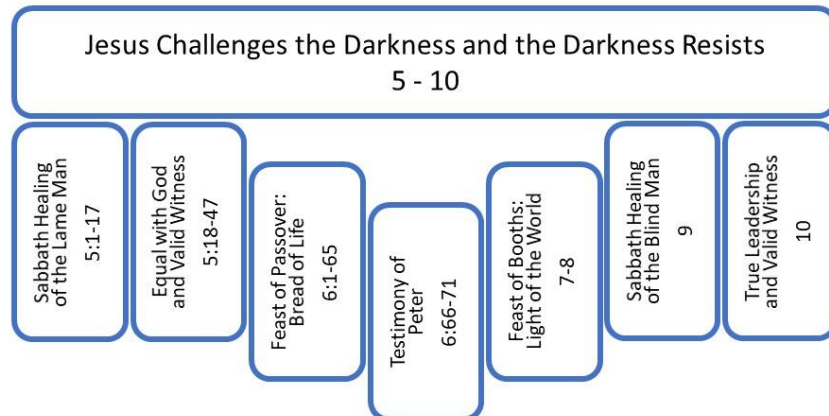


Lesson 12: John 6:1-51 I am the Bread of Life

Introduction



What do you want from Jesus?

I remember walking across campus as a college student who had grown up in church, thinking where is joy in my life? Where is peace? I had never seriously doubted the reality of God or the reality of Jesus as God. At that moment, I was questioning the reality of my own experience. The Bible clearly promises peace that goes beyond understanding. And joy. That's in all the songs. I read the Bible as a duty. I attended church as a requirement. I lived a moral life. I believed the basics to be true. But I did not feel love for God. I did not experience spiritual joy. I was often unsettled and anxious, experiencing a human peace when busy and distracted, but not knowing a spiritual peace that could overcome my worry. I wanted to know the joy and peace promised in the Bible.

What do you want from Jesus?

Would you like help with your marriage? Direction in your finances? Help for your children to grow and mature and make wise choices? Would you like a secure job? Would you like better government? Thoughtful leaders who are looking after the well-being of society? Would you like to be amazed? To experience something more than the steady flow of life? These are all good desires. Good things to seek out.

What do you want from Jesus?

Some people just want the basics from Jesus. They want food on the table. Health for themselves and their family. They want shelter in a safe and secure place. They want love in a relationship.

What do you want from Jesus?

That's a critical question for us to be asking as we consider the nature of saving faith. What am I really after? What motivates me to call on the name Jesus?

That question is central to John chapter 6.

In this chapter we have two miracles, followed by a dialogue with a crowd, followed by a test of faith that leads many disciples to give up on Jesus, followed by a testimony from one of Jesus' main disciples. In this lesson, we will consider the two miracles and the initial dialogue. We will save the faith test and Peter's witness for the next lesson.

The feeding of the 5000 is recorded in all four gospels. And just like John, Matthew and Mark include the account of Jesus walking on water right after the feeding account. John, however, is the only one to give us the dialogue with the crowd that then follows on the next day. Let's start with the miracle of the bread and fish. This is also the fourth of John's seven signs.

The Fourth Sign, Jesus Feeds 5000 (6:1-14)

¹ After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). ² A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. ⁵ Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" ⁶ This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. ⁷ Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." ⁸ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, ⁹ "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. ¹² When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

What do these people want from Jesus?

John uses the word sign twice, once at the beginning of the account and once at the end. Verse 2 gives us a general motive for why this large crowd of people followed Jesus, "because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick." These are apparently not the sick. Jesus has gone around to the far side of the Sea of Galilee. The lame, blind, and deaf could not follow him there. But many who had seen Jesus heal did follow him.

They expected something from Jesus. But I doubt anyone expected Jesus to create bread and fish. John emphasizes the abundance of provision twice. First, he tells us that Jesus told the disciples to gather the leftovers after the people were filled. They did not just have a bite to tide them over. The 5000 people present ate bread and fish until they were satisfied. Then, they gathered up 12 baskets of leftover bread. This is not a miracle of people sharing what they have. This is a miracle of creation, revealing Jesus' divine power to call things into being and revealing Jesus' willingness to provide.

The people came because they had seen signs of healing. The experience this sign gives them another idea.

¹⁴ Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

What do they want from Jesus now?

They wanted something more in life. And their plan is to get it by making Jesus king. The plan starts with new leadership. That sounds familiar doesn't it. If we just had a better king or president or prime minister who would give us everything we want and make our nation great. That would fix things. At least it is a start.

We can imagine their desire to be free of the Romans. They want to enjoy feeling part of something special. They want to be the Israel of old like in the times of David and Solomon. They want a leader to provide peace, security and bread. And Jesus is their guy. He is the Prophet like Moses. He has done a great miracle. Who better to be king?

So, they have an agenda for Jesus. This is how Jesus can make our lives better. But even as they prepare to push their agenda onto Jesus, Jesus sees their intention and draws back. He will not entrust himself to them because their intention runs contrary to the work of salvation that he intends to do for them in accordance with the will of the Father.

This sign sets up the dialogue. And we see here how they people read the sign. They do not want Jesus. They want something from Jesus. They want Jesus to be who they want him to be, so he can provide for them.

As a contrast, John then gives us a concise report of Jesus walking on water. And this is just going to be Jesus with his disciples. This is the fifth sign reported by John.

The Fifth Sign, Jesus Walks on Water (6:15-24)

¹⁶ Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ and after getting into a boat, they *started to* cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea *began to* be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened. ²⁰ But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹ So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

²² The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but *that* His disciples had gone away alone. ²³ There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate 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 small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus.

John leaves out the part about Peter walking on water. I wonder why. That seems like a fitting addition for his theme of faith in this gospel. But perhaps, he wanted to keep this report short, using it just as a contrast to the main dialogue of the chapter between the crowd and Jesus. And John will give Peter his chance to shine at the end of the chapter. Here are some observations from this short account.

The only words of Jesus here are, "It is I. Do not be afraid." The Greek is shorter, just four words, "I am. Fear Not." This is our second absolute "I am" statement. Like with the Samaritan woman, this is not an example with an object like when Jesus says, "I am the Light." This is Jesus simply saying, "I am."

Those four words, "I am. Fear not." are directed straight at the human soul. When we come to Jesus looking for something, for food, for healing, for blessings, for guidance, whatever we are looking for, when we come, we find ourselves standing before the one whose name is "I am." We may not have come looking for him. And if the eyes of our heart are not opened, we may not even see him when we stand right in front of him. But when we do so Jesus, we see the Holy One of God, the All Powerful One, The Righteous One. The One who creates out of nothing. Who commands the elements. Who reigns over the laws of physics. He is the one who sees into our souls and knows our intentions. He is never fooled. To see him truly is to experience him seeing you. When you stand before him, the right response is fear. We do not fear nearly enough for we do not fully see his holiness, nor do we understand our own sinfulness. Isaiah did. Isaiah saw. And he fell on his face, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts (Isaiah 6:5)."

As long as we see Jesus as the one who exists to meet our needs, as our genie in the bottle, we do not see Jesus. We do not make Jesus king. Jesus is King. Jesus is the Lord of Hosts. When we see Jesus rightly in his glory, when we see Jesus rightly in his glory, when he says to us, "I am," we are going to need for him also to say to us, "Do not fear."

The disciples get here another glimpse of who Jesus really is with the power over the elements. And they continue to be a model for us of struggling, yet sincere, human faith. I do not want to make too much out of their response here, to make it too positive. They are still struggling to see who Jesus really is. And in fact, in his Gospel at the end of this incident, Mark says, "They were greatly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened." So, their faith, they are still struggling in their hearts. And Mark focuses on that struggle. But here, John is willing to focus only on the positive. And even though they are struggling, they are still attached to Jesus. And the text tells us that they "receive" Jesus into the boat.

That word "receive" is important in John. It is the word from John 1:11-12 where we are told, "those who were his own did not receive him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God." It is an idea linked to faith. The same idea is communicated about the Galileans in 4:45 who welcomed, or received Jesus, though without truly receiving Jesus. Jesus reveals his glory to the disciples, as he walks across the water. And they see and receive.

This self-revelation of power was just for the disciples. Jesus entrusted this just to them. The rest of the crowd was left behind. They wake up expecting Jesus to be nearby but cannot find him anywhere. And they knew that the disciples had left in a boat. And the boat was gone. They left without Jesus. So, surprised at not finding Jesus, many of them get into available boats, and they follow the disciples because certainly the disciples are going to be able to find Jesus.

This crowd that has gone looking for Jesus finds him. And now we are ready for the dialogue the revealing dialogue that follows. I am going to address it in three parts, beginning, middle and end.

The beginning of the dialogue is John 6:25-34.

The Beginning of the Dialogue (6:25-34)

²⁵ When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." ²⁸ Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." ³⁰ So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so 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 out of heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ³³ "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." ³⁴ Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

These people were searching after Jesus. They are putting in some effort. They followed him into the country, up onto a mountain. They spent the night out there. And now they have tracked him across the Sea of Galilee. They have not given up on Jesus. But why? What do they want from Jesus?

When they find him, they ask the question of the moment, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" They had wanted him when they woke up, but he was not around. They did not see him leave. And they had set out after him. And now they want the answer to the mystery, how did he disappear?

And Jesus, as he does so often, completely ignores the question. He is not interested in telling them that he walked across the water. He is not going to entrust that to them. Instead, knowing the hearts of men and women, he turns the conversation back to motivation and desire. Why do you want to find me in the first place? Verses 26-27,

²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ Do not work for the food which

perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.”

Signs had led Nicodemus to conclude something about Jesus. That he had come from God. When he told her about her past, the Samaritan woman responded to that sign by declaring Jesus to be a prophet and then willingly received correction from Jesus as he revealed more to her. On the other hand, the men by the pool of Bethesda, when told “The man who healed me told me to pick up my mat,” ignored completely the potential sign of healing. They didn’t even hear it. Instead, they focused on the fact that Jesus authorized the breaking of a religious rule.

Signs do not work if you cannot read them correctly and certainly do not work when you ignore them. Nicodemus was confused. He saw the sign but couldn’t read it. The religious leaders were antagonistic. They ignored the sign. This crowd is misled by their own desire. Their desire is getting I the way of understanding the sign. They want more bread. And that present surface level desire gets in the way of deeper reflection about what has just happened. They do not show desire to follow-up on the sign. They are happy to eat the bread, but they are not thinking about how it pointed them not to what Jesus did, but to who Jesus is.

Wanting something from Jesus can be the thing that prevents us from wanting Jesus.

Just like with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman, Jesus speaks to these people metaphorically about spiritual reality. Jesus redirects them, telling them that they need to do something to get something. They need to work for food that is eternal. The problem is not in desiring something from Jesus. The problem is when we hold on to that desire so tightly that we will not be redirected by God to that which is more important. They want bread. Ok. That is not a bad desire. But you have Jesus with you right now, and Jesus is telling you that there is something more important that you need to be thinking about.

Again, just like with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, these people take Jesus’ metaphor literally. They want bread and cannot get past literal bread. Jesus has told them it is going to take work. They might be willing to work for the bread. But they want to know what kind of work is required.

“Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”

Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

They have been hiking around for a couple of days to get what they want from Jesus. They are willing to do some work. Give them some ritual to do or moral requirement to fill or activist plan to execute, and they may be all in. There is no telling what religious people will do to get what they want out of their religion. Religious people understand when they are given requirements, that they are going to have to fulfill those requirements in order to get what they are looking for.

Jesus gives them a work far easier and far harder than that. “Believe in me. That’s the work you do.” This is not the kind of religious work they expected. Or if they were expecting some political job to set him up as king, it is not that either. They believe in their hearts, like we all naturally do, that we get something from God by doing something to merit reward. Ritual, good works, action, these are the kind of works that merit favor. Faith can be understood this way. If we are spiritual enough and focused enough and committed enough to truly believe in God, if that is how we think about faith, faith is my effort to believe, then our faith is a spiritual work that deserves reward. If you have enough faith, then you are spiritual enough to get what you have earned. But that is not the kind of faith Jesus is talking about. Jesus calls it a work here, but as he does so often, he is using their language to challenge pre-conceptions as he is calling them to something significantly different than the normal human assumption.

Jesus calls them to the work that is not a work. This work is simply an acknowledgement of who Jesus is and a submission to that reality. This work of faith is simply honoring Jesus as the Holy One sent

from God, bowing to him as Lord, and receiving from him the grace he offers, and then following after him in the new life he gives. Faith is spiritual sight that leads to a response. That is the work they must do. It is both simple and yet, also impossible apart from the hand of God. We simply will not see or respond if God does not do something in us.

Still not getting the metaphor, they challenge Jesus to prove himself.

They said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'"

Really? The irony here. You have seen signs of healing. That's what brought you out in the wilderness in the first place. And then, once you got here, you experienced this great miracle of the loaves and the fish. And now you are going to stand there and brazenly challenge Jesus to do another sign. Now, it is not a bad reference that they pull out of Scripture. Manna from heaven under the leadership of Moses certainly fits with the miracle of the feeding of 5000, and it fits with the metaphor Jesus himself is using. So, they are in the right context. On the surface, it is a good religious response, a good use of Bible.

But it is also revealing of their underlying heart attitude. They are using the Bible to argue further what they want from Jesus. In a sense they are daring Jesus to make more bread. Or trying to manipulate Jesus to make bread. And that has been done to him before in the wilderness by someone else with seriously bad intentions. To that earlier challenge, Jesus responded, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." It's good to know your Bible. It is foolish to try to manipulate God using his own word. God will always win that argument. God sees the intention of the heart. In this case, they use the Bible to continue arguing for their own agenda.

Jesus has already called them out for their heart motive even before they make this challenge. He has already told them that they do not want to know him. They want bread. This response affirms what Jesus has said.

Still, Jesus does not respond in anger to their misguided response, their attempt at manipulation, their argument. But he does ignore the request and continues on with his metaphor, urging them to consider their deeper need.

³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." ³⁴ Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

They envision daily bread, physical bread out of heaven. That is what they think Jesus is saying. God did provide life for the Israelites in the desert through Moses. He gave them the sustenance they needed to sustain their biological existence. It is the longest ongoing miracle in Scripture, operating on an enormous scale. God is willing to provide for our earthly needs. But a question we should ask about those Israelites in the wilderness long ago is whether the sign of manna led them to the deeper need. Did they move from physical dependence to spiritual dependence? Did they move past the surface blessing to come to the deeper need of knowing and experiencing relationship with God?

That is what Jesus is telling this crowd to do. Biologically living human beings are dead spiritually. Since the garden of Eden, we have been cut off, by nature, from the spiritual life that comes through relationship with God. Jesus is saying, "That manna came from God to sustain physical life, while at the same time pointing to something more important. I am speaking to you of a bread that also comes from God in heaven, but it is a bread that gives more than physical life. It is a bread that makes you alive spiritually."

Speaking about eternal life, Jesus is not talking only about life after that starts after death. Jesus is speaking about a life that starts now. He has hinted at this new kind of life before. He told

Nicodemus, "You must be born again." New life starts with a new birth. It is a spiritual regeneration. He calls it abundant life in John 10:10. That is the life he has come to give. And just as there is belief that is not belief and belief that is true belief. So also, there is life that is not life and there is life that is true life. Jesus offers true life. Human beings are meant to be alive biologically and spiritually.

The offer and the response remind us of the Samaritan woman. Jesus said to her, "The water I give shall become a well of water springing up to eternal life." The woman responded, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty, nor come all the way here to draw." She took it literally. The response here sounds pretty much the same, "Lord, always give us this bread." Like with the woman, they are still thinking about something physical that sustains biological life.

Jesus will explain further. He has already clarified for them what work they must do to receive the kind of bread he is talking about. The work is to believe in him. It is the work that is not a work. It is faith. And he has told them that this is no ordinary bread for ordinary life, but a special bread that brings people alive for eternity. Now Jesus is going to clarify for them what the bread of life actually is.

This is the middle part of the dialogue in John 6:35-48.

The Middle of the Dialogue (6:35-48)

A ³⁵ Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life**; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who **believes** in Me will never thirst. ³⁶ "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not **believe**."

B ³⁷ **All that the Father gives Me will come to Me**, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

C ³⁹ This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me **I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day**. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

D ⁴¹ Therefore **the Jews were grumbling about Him**, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven."

X ⁴² They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?"

D' ⁴³ Jesus answered and said to them, "**Do not grumble among yourselves**."

C' ⁴⁴ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and **I will raise him up on the last day**."

B' ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' **Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me**. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.

A' ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, he who **believes** has eternal life. ⁴⁸ **I am the bread of life**."

If we seek something from Jesus without seeking Jesus, we might find a temporary satisfaction of our desires but will never find lasting satisfaction; not until we seek that which our soul truly needs. Lasting fulfillment is in Jesus, in knowing Jesus. Only in knowing Jesus can we come alive spiritually. And only in coming alive spiritually can we begin to experience the joy and peace our hearts long for. Lasting joy and peace, life, is not in Christian community, not in the Bible, not in good works, not in prayer and fasting; not when those things are considered as a means to find joy and peace. We do not find joy and peace by seeking joy and peace. We find joy and peace by seeking God, seeking to know Jesus. When we seek God, when we seek Jesus, through Christian community, through the

Bible, through doing good works, through prayer and fasting, when these things are means to knowing him, then joy and peace follows from that relationship, not as the end goal, but as a result of the end goal. God is the end goal. And when we know God, joy and peace are the right rewards that come from that loving relationship. They are the rewards in the sense that they are the right outcome of intimacy with our heavenly Father.

What do you want from Jesus? Do you only want to satisfy natural or biological desires, or do you want to come alive to the more fundamental desire for God, to desire God?

A and A' (35-36 and 47-48)

“I am the bread of life!” is the first “I am” statement with an object in the Gospel of John. Did you notice that Jesus repeated it? In the first verse of the section, verse 35, Jesus declared, “**I am the bread of life**; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who **believes** in Me will never thirst.” Then at the end in verses 47-48, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who **believes** has eternal life. **I am the bread of life.**”

And when we have repetition at the beginning and end of a section, what should we start looking for? Yes. More repetition. There may not be anymore. But we have to look. What we find here is another chiasmic section in the middle of the dialogue. This one has four parallel pairs and a lone central idea. We begin and end with Jesus declaration, “I am the bread of life” and with the key word “believe”. This is our A and our A.’

I am going to go through each pair of ideas just like I did with the chiasm in chapter 5, but I am not suggesting that this is the way we are supposed to read a chiasm. The dialogue works by reading it straight through. I am breaking it down into the pairs to help us observe carefully the key ideas of the dialogue. I am assuming that those key ideas are the repeated ideas in the parallel pairs.

So, the first key idea in A and A’ is “I am the Bread of life” and the challenge to believe.

B and B' (37-38 and 45-46)

B and B’ are verses 37-38 and 45-46.

Jesus says in 37-38, “**All that the Father gives Me will come to Me**, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” Then in 45-46, “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught of God.’ **Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.** Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.”

Two ideas are repeated. First is that idea that God initiates who comes to Jesus. “All that the Father gives” and “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father,” these are the ones who will come to me. That the Father is the one who gives us into the hands of Jesus does not surprise us because we have encountered already, for example with Nicodemus, the declaration that some kind of spiritual work or regeneration of being born again must take place in the human heart in order to see, to see the kingdom of heaven, to enter the kingdom of heaven. God must do something for true faith to exist. And when God does that in a person’s heart then they come to Jesus. True faith sees and responds.

The second idea in these short passages is the idea of Jesus coming from God. He has come down from heaven to do God’s will. And it is the Father’s will to give a remnant to Jesus, that some would come to him.

C and C' (39-40 and 44)

C and C’ come next in 39-40 and 44.

Jesus says in 39-40, “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me **I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.** For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” Then

in verse 44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and **I will raise him up on the last day.**”

The key idea repeated in this parallel pair is the statement that Jesus will raise up on the last day all who have come to him, all who are given to him by the Father. Both pairs state their ideas as a group reality and as an individual reality. The group idea comes first with the word “all”. It is like this, “all that the Father gives me will come to me” and “of all that He has given me I lose nothing.” Then we get the individual sense, “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” and “everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life.” There is a body, a flock, a group of individuals given to Jesus by the Father, and with the emphasis here that the Son will lose not one of these but raise all to eternal life. This group is made up of individuals who believe in Jesus and are going to be taken care of by Jesus.

Faith is not something that merits eternal life after death. If so, eternal life might be something we gain and then we lose and then we gain again and then we lose again, and so on, throughout our current biological existence until death, after which, we find out whether or not we were able to hold on until the end. Jesus’ teaching here indicates that the faith he requires comes from the Father. It is something the Father does, and it leads to a secure relationship with him. The faith is not merited by us in the first place. It is spiritual sight that leads to a response that has an effect. The one who believes is born again spiritually, at that moment, entering into an unearned, yet eternal state of life. Jesus connects here the ideas that faith is initiated by the will of God and, therefore, is ensured through the work of Jesus. No one who comes will be lost, can be lost.

Of course, Jesus’ teaching here raises a number of questions. We have all known people who have claimed to be believers and turned away from Jesus. We have known people who claim to be believers and yet, do not live like believers at all. And we have known people who claim to be believers, leave for a while, and then come back. What are we to make of all this, and the different variations of it?

Whatever we are to make of it, we ought to interpret our experiences according to the teaching of Jesus and not the other way around. Experience does not define our theology. Experience will at times give us insight, at other times it will confuse, at other times it will dismay us. But we take that experience, and we come back to the word of God in order to reinvestigate our assumptions. But we are taking our cue from what the Scripture says. Our experience cannot mean something other than what the Word teaches. And what does Jesus teach?

So far in this gospel, it is not hard to believe that many who turn away from Jesus actually never truly believed in Jesus. They believed things about Jesus. They were seeking things from Jesus. They have an idea of who they think Jesus is. And they enjoy the community of faith for a while. But like many in this gospel, they believed without believing, received without receiving, claimed to know without knowing. That is a true spiritual reality that we have to take into account. In the community of faith there are many who don’t truly believe. And sometimes we are just mistaken about whether a person was truly born again or not.

Now, I am not saying that that is an answer for all of the experiences. It is an apparent answer in this chapter where Jesus is declaring he will not lose one and yet, by the end of the chapter many disciples end up walking away. And the implication here is that, at least for those disciples, they never truly believed. We have come to recognize that not all who claim to want to learn from Jesus, who claim to be disciples, have really come to see Jesus. But there is more to this question, and we will address it more as we go along in the gospel. Later we will have to ask, “What about Judas?” And then later still, “What about Peter and his denial?”

For now, what we see here is Jesus promising eternal security for everyone whom the Father gives to him.

D and D' (41 and 43)

This idea that Jesus is himself the bread of life offered by God is not something that the majority of this crowd was ready to accept. D and D' both highlight grumbling in the audience. John tells us in verse 41, "Therefore **the Jews were grumbling about Him**, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." And then in verse 43, "Jesus answered and said to them, '**Do not grumble among yourselves.**'"

And what do we think about when we hear the word grumbling? Well, there is a good chance that we think about the generation that wandered in the desert. Day after day for forty years they experienced the miraculous sign of bread from heaven. But did they ever recognize the sign and seek out a deeper sense of dependence in relationship with God?

John has been leading us to this conclusion. All of chapter 6 has set up for us the background context of Exodus and Numbers. John is the only gospel writer to mention that the feeding of the 5000 happened when "the Passover of the Jews was at hand." John tells us that a great multitude followed Jesus out to the mountain, that they had nothing to eat, and Jesus gave them bread. Jesus then miraculously crosses over the Sea of Galilee, reminiscent of Moses taking Israel through the Red Sea. Then in the dialogue, we have the crowd of Jews bringing up the reference themselves, saying, "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'" They had called Jesus the Prophet. That means they were already comparing him to Moses. If we complete the comparison and Jesus is Moses that makes the crowd here equivalent to the Israelites in the wilderness.

Ironically, they have fulfilled their own comparison in a most unfavorable way. The Israelites following Moses refused to follow where the sign of manna pointed them. They were faithless, grumbling the whole time. Even at the end in Numbers 21 as they are moving back towards the promise land, so that the second generation can go in, they still are bringing up the same repeated, complaint, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt in this wilderness to die? For there is no food and no water, and we loath this miserable food." We loathe the manna from heaven. That's my imagination of what church would become like for someone who has been in it that long believing without truly believing. That at some point you start to loath it. It might be fun at first, you get to know new people and new things. But I cannot imagine spending 40 years worshiping God without the experience of being born again. How boring. How dull and tedious. I can see using the word loathing.

And just like those Israelites of old, these Israelites in the crowd with Jesus, they grumble, quickly. They were happy to receive bread from Jesus, and they are even willing to do some kind of work for more. But they cannot accept that Jesus himself is the answer to what they want.

X (42)

They do begin asking the right sort of questions, though it is going to be with the wrong sort of attitude. The center of the passage is verse 42, where they ask,

"Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven?'"

That is what they should be asking. Who is this Jesus? But they do not ask it with an openness of heart to really seek out the truth about Jesus. They ask it by way of rejecting any greater claim. They have already decided who he is. It is a rhetorical question for him. He is only the son of Joseph and Mary. His claim to come out of heaven is ridiculous. We reject it. And like the religious leaders by the pool of healing in Jerusalem, they forget about the miraculous signs he has done when they are assessing his claims. They are not putting the two together.

The signs pointed them toward Jesus, but they were unable to read the language of the signs and unwilling to learn how. They stuck to their own assumptions about him. They held onto their own desires. "This is who we believe you to be and this is what we want you to give us."

None in this crowd experienced the power of the statement “I am. Fear not.” That was reserved for the smaller group of disciples who would prove to be truly his because God had given them to him. The end of this dialogue goes to verse 58. But I am just going to read through verse 51 as a conclusion for this lesson. Then we will pick up where we leave off in the next lesson. So, let’s end with 49-51.

The End of the Dialogue (6:49-51)

⁴⁹ “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”

What do you want from Jesus? Jesus tells the crowd their desires are too limited. They want bread for this life. That’s a need. But he fed their fathers bread for forty year, and they died. Jesus is offering something more fundamental. Jesus offers eternal life that starts in the here and now through faith in him. To know and believe in Jesus is the key to this new kind of life, to real life.

What do you want from Jesus?

Reflection questions

1. Read quickly through the two signs described in John 6:1-24. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. Read through the beginning of the dialogue in John 6:25-34. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
3. Read through the middle of the dialogue in John 6:35-48. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
4. What does it mean to you that Jesus is the Bread of Life? Is that the same as saying he provides living water (as he said to the Samaritan woman)?
5. Read through the end of the dialogue in John 6:25-34. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
6. What do Jesus’ assurances in 6:39-40 and 44 mean for you personally?
7. What do you think about this statement, “What you want from Jesus might be the thing keeping you from Jesus?” Does your personal experience lead you to agree or disagree?