

We've been working through the Gospel of John, exploring its major themes in relation to his purpose for writing, which is, "That we may believe, and by believing, we may have life in his name." (John 20:31) One of the key themes John highlights is that Jesus is the Bread of Life, meaning that he not only gives life but also sustains it. This refers to our eternal life.

I have heard it said that, as Christians, when we exhale our last breath on earth, we inhale our next breath in eternity, so there is no lapse in consciousness; our life simply continues on. I find this to be a beautiful way of thinking about the eternal life we have in Christ.

Today, we will take one final look at this theme—Jesus, the Bread of Life—before moving on to the next, all with the intention of guiding us toward belief in Christ.

For those of us who know Jesus as the sustainer of our lives and have experienced his sustaining power at work, would you please stand for the reading of God's word?

Read John 6:41-59.

I mentioned two weeks ago that John does, in fact, have a structure to his writing and there is a method to his madness. His gospel account is not simply a retelling of his favorite stories with the hope that we will share the same enjoyment he has in writing them. John was the last living apostle, and his gospel was likely written sometime around or after 70 A.D. By this time, Peter had likely already been martyred, and the other gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—would have been in circulation and read by many.

John has a very specific purpose for writing, and as you will see, one of the tactics he employs is a miracle followed by a discourse of Jesus claiming to be God. We are filling out our understanding of how to approach John's gospel. You see that format being used here as well. Two weeks ago, we saw Jesus feed 5,000, after which the crowd identified Jesus as the Prophet and wanted to forcibly make him their king. Then, we see him walk on water, both occurrences alluding to Moses and showing that Jesus is greater than Moses and is here to lead a new exodus.

Afterward, Jesus teaches members of the crowd and those in a local synagogue in Capernaum that he is the Bread of Life, giving context to the miracle he performed the day before. Just as God provided the Israelites with manna from heaven, Jesus is God's provision from heaven, and a different kind of manna. In our text, we are about to see Jesus take this point even further, drawing a line in the sand between those who truly believe and those who simply want a savior they can understand.

This can be important for us as readers because it is exactly what John is trying to accomplish for us as well. Imagine, as we read this account, that we are members of the congregation trying to make up our minds about this Jesus character. Do we like what he is saying? Do we agree with him? Are we willing to put our belief in him for our eternal salvation? These are the questions that John is trying to get you and me to answer for ourselves. So, Let's work our way through this account to see if we can come to a conclusion.

Verse 41 begins with, "So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, 'I am the bread of life that came down from heaven.' They said, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?"

John uses the term "Jews" to identify the crowd, which would have been a pejorative term, hinting at the direction the narrative is headed. It starts by saying that they grumbled, which should remind us of the Israelites in the Old Testament who grumbled against God and Moses. Grumbling is a dangerous posture to take when dealing with God. What is happening here is that they are trying to sort out amongst themselves who Jesus is, but with a negative tone, instead of responding to Jesus with belief.

This is an attitude we should be aware of in our own lives as well. Do we sometimes find ourselves having an internal conversation about what we think of Jesus and walking away with a cynical attitude? This reveals a heart of unbelief, which should be concerning to us. So, be on the lookout for grumbling.

This is a common component I find in the lives of those who have deconstructed their faith and walked away from the church. They grumble against God and find a crowd of people who agree with them.

Secondly, we find the statement they take issue with: Jesus' claim, "...I have come down from heaven." Jesus is being intentionally provocative here. He knows he is among people from his hometown, and knowing their hearts, he leads them into confirming what he already knows. They say, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"

How can Jesus claim to have come from heaven when they know his earthly parents? Jesus moves past their remarks and will soon use their own reasoning against them.

With unwavering confidence, Jesus confronts their grumbling and leans in, saying 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." Jesus knows the will of his Father and is not concerned with unbelief. He is speaking to those whom the Father has given him. Do you sense

him calling you this morning? Even as a believer, is your heart stirred this morning with affection for Jesus?

Last week at the park, I sidestepped the predestination tone of this text, realizing that for many, it can be a confusing and sometimes painful topic to discuss. I don't think that it needs to be, but I wanted to share a quote that I think we can all agree on and find helpful.

D.L. Moody said, "When you are saved, it's as if you walk through a door with a sign over it saying, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." You walk through the door and when you look back, you see on the other side of the door the words, "Before the creation of the world I knew you."

Not ignoring the grumbling of those listening, Jesus further explains in verses 45-46, "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father."

Here Jesus synthesizes the teachings of the prophets, explaining that those who believe in him have been taught by the Father, as the prophets said they would be, because Jesus has been with the Father and is the embodiment of God.

What follows is a "mic drop" moment from Jesus in verse 47. He closes out his statement regarding where he is from by saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life." This statement caps off Jesus' point. All who come to believe in Jesus must come to him on his terms of grace. By believing in Jesus, we are not doing him any favors or adding anything to him as if our support makes what Jesus is saying true. By believing in Jesus, he does not receive from us; rather, we receive from him. Belief is a requirement, not a suggestion. Coming to believe in Jesus is not a casual endorsement. Our belief in Jesus is not like clapping for Tinkerbell. Jesus does not live for the applause of men. Belief in Jesus is not about contributing something to him but rather receiving something from him—namely, eternal life. He simply puts the invitation out there to do with it what we will fully know for those who respond the Father has given him. Do you feel yourself being drawn to belief in him this morning?

Perhaps if you or I were in Jesus' shoes, we would recognize that there were individuals who were not responding well to what we were saying, so we would take a different approach. However, not Jesus. Because they don't understand what Jesus is saying in natural terms, he begins to speak in metaphors to further drive home the point. What he says offends some individuals so deeply that they can't help but walk away, revealing what Jesus already knew to be true: that they didn't really believe.

Consider with me for a moment that there are circumstances we face in our lives that test our faith, and God tests our faith for our own benefit to reveal to us what he already sees: that we don't believe or that we don't trust him fully. I want to encourage you that if you find yourself grumbling or complaining about God because of your circumstances, perhaps he is trying to reveal in you a lack of faith and belief in him.

Jesus goes on to say in verses 49-51, "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

In what would go on to become the first "your daddy joke" in history, just as the crowd mentioned Jesus' father and he corrected them, he mentions their fathers who ate manna in the wilderness and died. Here, Jesus again claims to be the living bread, come down from heaven, and declares that if anyone eats of this bread, they will have eternal life. He then says, "And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh," clearly alluding to his crucifixion.

Now, this clearly offends the Jews who are asking, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus doesn't back down, and in what is known as the 'hard sayings of Jesus,' he drives the point home further, saying, "So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.'"

Does this mean that Jesus is advocating for cannibalism? Of course not; you would have to be incredibly dense to think that's what Jesus means here. Again, he is using a metaphor, just as he has been the whole time, but he is intending to do this to drive the crowd to make a decision about him. When Jesus speaks of eating, he is speaking of believing. He did this earlier, "...everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (v. 40).

Jesus is so confident that the Father will give to him all that is his that he uses this evocative metaphor to separate those who believe because they understand, and those who don't believe because they don't want to.

Although we are only looking at verses 44-59, I want to conclude with Jesus' interaction with his closest disciples in verse 67. After what seems like a majority of the crowd leaves, he turns to the disciples and asks, "Do you want to go away as well?" Peter answers, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God."

When Jesus doesn't say something that we like or when we are tempted to grumble against him, do we respond like the crowd and walk away in our ignorance, or are we willing to come to Jesus on his own terms because we realize that it is he who has the word of life and that by believing in him, we recognize that we can have life in his name.

God is revealing to us what he already knows to be true.