

John 6:35-59

Week Two of the Bread of Life Discourse.

This week, we look at the meat-and-potatoes of the passage. Last week served as an introductory backdrop to the main teaching; next week we'll see the reaction of the crowd and disciples. This week, we'll be looking at a teaching so wonderful, and yet so hard to accept that all but the 12 abandon Jesus after he gives it. It's a long text, so let's get to it...

6:35

This is the main teaching that Jesus will unpack for us in the following verses.

Going back to the previous passage, the mistake the Jews made was to think that Moses gave them the manna from heaven. If this was the case, and Jesus is presenting himself as a New Moses, then he would produce some kind of neverending-bread. But it was God who gave the people the manna from heaven, not Moses. And now God has given the people Jesus; the neverending bread.

What this means for us is that we never need to move beyond Jesus to a "blessing that he gives." He is the blessing. He is the answer. There's no need to move beyond Jesus.

What does it mean to never hunger or thirst? Keep reading...

6:36

We might think that, because the crowd is in the same vicinity as Jesus that they have "come to" him. But to "come to Jesus" means more than to be in the same physical location as he is. To "come to Jesus" means something else entirely. And it is those who "come to him" that will never hunger or thirst... it is they who will want for nothing.

6:37-38

Gospel! The moral, social, or economic standing of the one who comes to Jesus means nothing. We never have to worry about being rejected by Jesus because of what we've done, who we are, or what other people think of us.

Why will Jesus never turn anyone away from him?

Because the ones who are coming to him are ones given to him by the Father. (Confused yet?) Again, this is gospel. Jesus is unable and unwilling to turn people away from him. (Which flies in the face of who many people think Jesus is; and undermines any system of works-righteousness.)

Because we are sent by the Father to Jesus, Jesus will not turn us away. This is an impressive statement when you consider that some of the people who “come” to him are antagonistic to him and his cause. Think: Paul!

6:39

So what’s the purpose of those who “come to Jesus”? What’s the goal of our relationship with him? Ask the average Christian and he or she will say something like: to have their sins forgiven... or to go to heaven. But these are not the goal. You’ll notice that in this entire discourse, Jesus never once mentions heaven. So any talk of heaven in this passage is something we bring to the text from outside... it is not being faithful to the text.

Even the forgiveness of sins is not even the goal for those who are drawn to Jesus. The forgiveness of sins serves an even greater purpose. The goal for those who are drawn to Jesus is given in the phrase that is repeated most frequently in the “bread of life” discourse: being “raised up on the last day.” (Ironically, then, the passage shouldn’t be called the “bread of life” discourse, but the “raised up on the last day” discourse. Not as catchy, but...)

6:40

Just stop and think for a minute about what it means that the Father wants us to live forever. Insignificant specks on a small terrestrial ball in the infinitely vast universe. And the creator of it all is not just aware that we exist, but that he wants us to live forever.

Back to the academics of it all.

Being raised “on the last day” assumes two things:

- We will die.
- There will be a “last day.”

How do these two realities color how we live our lives as compared to those who do not believe in one or both?

6:41

Back to the reaction of the Jews.

Far from recognizing that Jesus has just told them that their Father wants them to live forever, cares about them, will never turn them away, and will raise them up on the last day, the Jews take offense that the Father would use Jesus to accomplish any of these things. (Maybe because they thought they could either accomplish eternal life on their own, or that they would be used by God to give it to others.)

6:42

This is the first time either of Jesus' "parents" have been mentioned. No doubt the intended reader would have known that Mary was Jesus' biological mother. (Although some tend to intentionally minimize it and others intentionally inflate it, Mary's prominent position in the early church cannot be disputed.) We have been told that God is Jesus' father. So while the intended reader probably would have known the connection of Joseph to Jesus, it is also a sure thing that the reader should know (because John has told them), that God (and not Joseph) is Jesus' father. Their statement about Jesus' parents is wrong.

The point of this verse is to show how those who opposed Jesus believed they knew him. And they were tragically mistaken.

6:43-44

This is the third time the expression: "raised up on the last day" is used. (As compared to how many times Jesus refers to himself as "the bread of life"? So what should the theme of this passage be? Just sayin...)

There is a good deal of disagreement about what the first part of 6:44 means. Some say it supports absolute predestination... or at least the doctrine of total depravity. Others say that while God draws us, we have to willingly follow his lead. The question is: does God DRAW us like a dog on a choke-collar (where there's no point in resisting), or does he draw us like a mouse is drawn by a trail of cheese crumbs on the ground? What do you think?

6:45

And so the question is: does this quote from Isaiah find its fulfillment in the teaching of Jesus? (And, if so, then we see yet ANOTHER passage where Jesus is clearly called God.) If this is not fulfilled in the teaching of Jesus, then his teaching and his life are meaningless.

What this verse also does is draw a line in the sand. Jesus is either God teaching the people in fulfillment of Isaiah's words. Or he is wrong. But he will not allow himself to be another voice among many. Easy for us to say: "AMEN" to this. But if we agree with this statement, what difference does it make in our lives?

In other words, if we were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence for a conviction?

6:46

Since no one has seen Father except the Son, only Jesus can be the one who teaches in the Father's name (6:45). Students from other teachers cannot claim to be taught by God because their teachers have never seen God.

This verse further separates Jesus from other pseudo-contemporaries, other teachers. He is of a different kind for the simple reason that he has seen the Father.

6:47

Interestingly, the ESV does not have this “truly truly” begin a new paragraph. IMHO, it should. It did the last time it was used at the start of this dialogue, and the next time it is used it begins a new thought of Jesus. So, let’s pretend it starts a new paragraph here.

FAITH is the key ingredient. But faith in what?

6:48

Faith that Jesus is the bread of life! I think people read this, and other places where Jesus has talked about being the bread of life, and assumed that he is the one who gives the bread of life. The bread of life would then be forgiveness, rescue from sin, etc. But this is not controversial enough to have everyone leave him when he gets done saying it. After all, what’s so radical about Jesus saying: “OK, so you saw me perform signs where you were miraculously fed. Now, I will give you something better than that... a kind of food (be it physical or spiritual) that will allow you to live forever and be raised on the last day”? Not much. It’s actually a logical bigger-and-better progression. More controversial is this: “OK, so you saw me perform signs where you were miraculously fed. Now, I will give you something better than that... bread of life. Et voila! It’s ME! I myself am the bread of life. Don’t look at what I can give; look at ME!”

6:49

The Old Testament lesson for this weekend, Numbers 14:26-35, is when the Lord promises that all of the adults who left Egypt would die in the wilderness because of their disobedience.

Jesus continues comparing the “food” that he IS to that of the food God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness. As good as that food was, it could not prevent the Israelites from perishing. The food that Jesus IS can!

6:50

This verse hinges on what the word “this” means. WHAT is the bread that comes down from heaven? What do you think?

6:51

The answer to the question from 6:50 is: JESUS is “this” bread that comes down from heaven! There are a couple of phrases that Jesus uses here that need a little explanation.

- Eats of this bread → how does one eat the “bread from heaven” (which is Jesus). Keep in mind we are explaining a metaphor with a metaphor. The “eating” is figurative in this context.
- Flesh → points us in the direction of the cross. This is where the “bread of life” gives life to the world.

I think it’s OK if we don’t fully understand what Jesus is saying at this point, because it is at this point that the Jews interrupt him with their frustrations...

6:52

And this raises the question: will Jesus give us his flesh to eat? Is he talking about a metaphoric eating? Both, perhaps?

6:53

Now, in the past, we were speaking, I believe, metaphorically. To “eat his flesh” means to believe in him as the bread of life. (Because that’s what you do with bread.) Jesus’ flesh is “bread” in the sense that it gives us life when it is “lifted up” on the cross.

But now, after a pause to let the Jews say what’s on their mind, I believe Jesus takes the conversation in a slightly different direction with the introduction of his blood. We’ve been talking about his body being the “bread from heaven,” but no reference to his blood until now.

And this is where the controversy in the church comes in: is Jesus talking about the Lord’s Supper? I think your view on this will hinge on this question: does the intended reader already understand or have knowledge of the importance of the sacrament of the altar? If so, then one could make the case that John has Jesus speaking obliquely about the Lord’s Supper. If the intended reader does not know about the Lord’s Supper, then even though Jesus is using words we use when we talk about the Lord’s Supper, we cannot command our understanding on the text. So, who’s John’s intended reader?

6:54

Jesus repeats what he said earlier: eat his flesh, drink his blood, have eternal life, be raised on the last day. There is nothing metaphoric in this verse, as there was in previous verses about his body being “bread.” And here we have an intersection of two themes for the first time: eating his flesh/ drinking his blood AND being “raised on the last day.” This is a key verse in the “bread of life” discourse!

And so the question, again, is raised: if he’s not talking about the Lord’s Supper, what is he talking about?

6:55

For me, this verse is the clincher that Jesus is, at least in some way, speaking about the Lord’s Supper. If we’re talking about a metaphoric eating and drinking of his flesh and blood (where it’s meaning is something akin to faith or trust), then Jesus should not say what he says here because his flesh would not be REAL food, nor his blood REAL drink.

6:56

Again, I don’t think we’re in Figruativille anymore. I think we left it when the Jews interrupted Jesus. And while there can be a secondary figurative element to this verse (feeding on Jesus flesh and blood meaning... have faith?), even that will

take you back to the Lord's Supper (where do you go to have faith strengthened? One of the places is...)

6:57

It's easy to overlook this verse while you are thinking about what it means to eat Jesus' body and drink his blood. But there is a wonderful Gospel promise here! As close as Jesus is to the Father (and we can get into a tangent on the inner-workings of the Trinity if you'd like), we have been invited to be as close to Jesus.

6:58

Jesus concludes with what sounds like an understatement: this "bread" that he's been talking about is a whole lot better than the manna!

When Jesus began his discourse, I'd imagine there were those listening who had a hard time conceptualizing how anything Jesus did could be better than miraculous daily provision from God. By the time you get through the Bread of Life discourse, Jesus says what he said at the beginning. Only now, we see the statement that what Jesus does (really, who he is) is better than miraculous daily provision for God as being an understatement! See how far Jesus has taken you in just a few short verses?

6:59

Nothing is in John accidentally. We already knew that Jesus was in Capernaum (6:24), but we did not know that he was in a synagogue until now. Why do you think John waits until the end of the discourse to let us know that this conversation/ discourse took place in a house of learning and worship?