

Notes on John 6

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The Feeding of the 5000 & Teaching about the Bread of Life – Chap. 6

The Feeding of the 5000 — John 6:1-13; (Cf. Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17)

Verses 1-3

1. Where did Jesus go? Who followed, and why (6:1-3)? (Note the names used here for the sea.)
2. List other passages that record the same event as in 6:1-13.

John records many events and details that are not recorded by the other writers, but the feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle (other than those associated with His death and resurrection) that is recorded by all four writers.

A multitude follows Jesus across the Sea of Galilee

Events in chap. 5 had occurred in Jerusalem. Some time must have intervened since then, as the events recorded here happened later (“after these things”) in Galilee. Jesus left with His disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee, which is here also called the “Sea of Tiberias.” This presumably means they went to the east side of the sea. There He went up on a mountain.

Matthew 14:13 says he went to an uninhabited place, and adds that He did so because He heard that John had been beheaded. Mark’s account (6:31) shows another reason He did this was so they could rest. The apostles had just returned from a preaching trip (Luke 9:10) and He thought they could all benefit from a rest, but so many people were around that they could not even meet their own needs.

However, they were unable to rest, because the people, having seen the signs or miracles He had accomplished, were determined to follow them. Mark adds that Jesus viewed them as sheep without a shepherd, so He taught them.

Verses 4-6

3. What question did Jesus ask Philip? Why did Jesus ask this question?

The multitude needs to eat.

The events recorded here occurred near the time of the Passover, which would mean it was spring. This also implies that much time had passed in John’s account, indicating that many events had occurred meanwhile that John did not record. In 2:13, Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for a Passover. In 5:1 He had been there again for an unnamed feast. Now the Passover was again drawing close.

Jesus questioned Philip as to where they could buy bread to feed so many people. But actually he was just testing Philip. Jesus already had a plan how He intended to feed the people. How was this a test? Perhaps the purpose was simply to challenge them to think about the magnitude of the task, so that they would be even more impressed by what Jesus was about to do. Jesus often asked questions, not for the purpose of obtaining information, but to make a point.

Matthew adds that this happened after the people had stayed with Jesus for a long time, and when evening came they needed food to eat. It is unclear, by comparing the accounts, who first brought up the matter of feeding the people, Jesus or the disciples.

Verses 7-9

4. What answer did Philip give? (Think: What does this show?)
5. What food did Andrew say was available?

Philip and Andrew discuss the problem of providing food for the people.

Philip said that they could not feed that multitude with 200 denarii worth of bread, if everyone was to have a little. A denarius is thought to be the typical wage for one day's work. If so, 200 denarii would be a significant amount to spend. Some have suggested that this was all the money that the apostles had among them, yet Philip says it would not be enough to provide everyone with even a little to eat. Matthew's account says the disciples recommended that Jesus send the people to the villages to buy food. Whatever else this tells us, it shows the huge size of the crowd and the extreme difficulty of feeding so many.

Matthew records that Jesus told the disciples to give the people food to eat. Andrew said there was a lad who had five loaves of bread and two fish (apparently enough for his own lunch). But he was convinced this was nothing considering the size of the crowd.

Once again, John makes sure that we have sufficient details about the miracle to be sure that it could not possibly have occurred by any natural means.

Verses 10,11

6. Describe the arrangements for feeding the people (vv 10,11).
7. How many people were fed?

Jesus feeds the people using the boy's lunch.

Jesus had the disciples give Him the food, then He had the people sit on the grass. Other accounts add that they were to sit in groups of 100's and 50's.

He blessed or gave thanks for the food before passing it out. This practice is often mentioned before meals in the Bible, especially the gospel. In fact one would be hard put to find an example of Christians eating when they did not first give thanks. Prayer and thankfulness should be a regular part of our lives, and before meals is an especially good time to be thankful.

Jesus then distributed to the 12 who in turn gave to the people. Coffman shows there is a symbolic significance in this. What Jesus here did with physical food is what He also did with spiritual food. He is the source of the truth, but it is distributed to the people through his inspired agents. These men dispense nourishment to our souls, even as they did the physical nourishment on this occasion.

We are here told that there were 5000 men present. Other accounts add that this did not count the women and children.

In addition, we are told that everyone received as much as they wanted. So the miracle did not involve giving each person just a small portion. Their need was met, not minimally, but to the point of complete satisfaction. Such provision for such a huge crowd could not possibly have come from just the food provided in the boy's lunch.

Verses 12,13

8. What was done with the remaining food? How much food was left over?
9. Special Assignment: Describe how the details that are given prove this event was impossible by natural law.

The remnants gathered

To further impress on us the greatness of this event, so we will know it could not be possible by natural means, John adds additional details. All the people were given as much as they wanted (v11), and they ate and were filled (v12). It was not the case that some just watched or just ate a little. Everybody ate their fill.

Then the remnants were gathered, and twelve baskets were taken up. But they had started out with just a few loaves and fishes. After all the people had eaten — 5000 men, not counting women and children — there was far more food left than at the beginning! In fact, the remnants were many times greater than the original amount.

John makes sure we have sufficient details that we cannot possibly wonder about what happened. There can be no doubt that Jesus multiplied the food many times. He who made the world at Creation, created the plants and animals with the ability to multiply and provide our food. But that takes natural process over considerable time. But here He did the same work in an instant of time, without the benefit of natural law. There is no way to avoid the conclusion that this is impossible by natural means and therefore a great miracle.

Verse 14

10. What effect did this have on the people (v14), and how does this again demonstrate the nature and purpose of Bible miracles?

The people conclude that Jesus is the Prophet to come into the world.

John then described the effect of the miracle on the people: they concluded Jesus was “the Prophet” (cf. 1:21). This almost surely refers to the prophet predicted by Moses in Deut. 18:15ff. Jesus had here miraculously provided the multitudes with food, much like Moses had (by the power of God) fed the people with manna in the wilderness. V31 shows without a doubt that the people made this specific comparison.

Other prophets had also miraculously provided people with food, especially Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:8-16; 2 Kings 4:1-7,42-44). The people recognized that Jesus had done a miracle that clearly required supernatural power, so they concluded He had to be a man sent from God.

Once again, we see here the purpose of miracles, and John’s purpose is recording the miracles. Miracles demonstrate Jesus’ great power and confirm the truthfulness of His claims that God was with Him. This particular miracle also proves His power to provide for the needs of His people. It shows He believes in being thankful for our food, and it also shows that He did not believe in being wasteful.

Jesus Walks on the Water — 6:15-21 (Matt. 14:22-33 Mark 6:45-56)

Verse 15

11. What were the people planning to do, and how did Jesus respond?

12. Case Study: Premillennialists teach that Jesus came to earth the first time intending to establish an earthly kingdom but failed because the people rejected Him. What application would v15 have to this view?

The people determine to make Jesus a king.

When Jesus had worked this great miracle, His popularity among the people was so great that they wanted to make Him a king by force. This almost surely means they were willing to use violence to rebel against the Roman rulers and set Jesus as their king instead of the foreign oppressors (not that they intended to use force against Him to compel Him to become king). Throughout their history, the Jews had fought to obtain or keep their independence from foreign powers. In particular, Moses had led them to take the promised land by defeating their enemies in military battle. If Jesus was the Messiah, the prophet like unto Moses, He could likewise lead them to conquer their enemies.

This shows the kind of kingdom the Jews expected and wanted their Messiah to establish: an earthly kingdom like that of David and Solomon. Jesus’ great miracle convinced them that Jesus was the Messiah and would make a great king. They were willing to achieve that end by military means (cf. John 18:36).

And the expectation these Jews had is exactly the same expectation that premillennial folks still have. They say Jesus failed to set up His kingdom when He came the first time, so they are

expecting Him to do it when He returns. They are as determined that Jesus be an earthly king as the Jews were here.

Jesus, however, refused to accept this course of action, and instead He left alone to the mountain. Contrary to the plans of the Jews and of modern premillennialists, Jesus did not come to be an earthly king and rule His enemies by physical domination. Had this been His intent, this would have been just the situation He was looking for. Why did He refuse it? Interestingly, premillennial folks say that the reason Jesus could not set up His kingdom was that the Jews rejected Him and killed Him. In fact, however, the Jews would have gladly accepted Him, had He been willing to set up the kind of kingdom premillennialists expect Him to set up. But one of the main reasons the people rejected was that He refused to be an earthly king when they tried to make Him one!

In fact, by the time the chapter is over, Jesus had refused repeatedly to satisfy the physical, earthly, material interests of these followers. As a result, whole multitudes refused to follow Him any more. Why so, if He came to be an earthly king and satisfy people's physical desires like Jews and premillennialists claim.

The same applies to the claims of many modern faith healers. They say Jesus came to do miracles to satisfy the physical needs of the multitudes. If so, why did He cease to do miracles when the people so obviously wanted Him to continue to do so? He could have had a huge following that would have been any faith healers dream, yet He refused. This whole chapter makes no sense at all, if these people hold the right view of Jesus' purposes.

On the other hand, the Bible says that Jesus' kingdom is spiritual and is the church. It began on the day of Pentecost, just as God always planned. Its purpose is not physical, earthly dominion, but the eternal salvation of souls. Jesus' emphasis throughout His ministry was on man's spiritual needs, not physical (see v27). This is why He did not satisfy people who emphasize material interests. Properly understood, this is the only sensible explanation to the events of this chapter. (See John 18:36; Col. 1:13,14; Matt. 16:18,19; Rom. 14:17; Eph. 3:10,11; 5:22-26; Acts 2:47; 20:28; etc.)

For in-depth studies of premillennialism and the nature of Jesus' kingdom, see our articles about those subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

Verses 16-18

13. Name two other passages that record the same event as vv 16-21.

14. Where were the disciples going, and how were they going there?

The disciples face a tempest on the sea.

Other accounts say that Jesus sent the disciples across the sea of Galilee in a boat, sent the multitudes away, and Himself went up into a mountain to pray. Note how often Jesus went to His Father in prayer. Prayer was a continual and powerful force in His life, and He often sought privacy so He could use His time in prayer more effectively.

At this point Mark says Jesus sent the disciples to Bethsaida, John says toward Capernaum, and both Mark and Matthew note that they land at Gennesaret (Mark 6:45,53; John 6:17; Matt. 14:34). Several possible explanations show there is no contradiction. Gennesaret is a region or area including both Capernaum and Bethsaida (the Sea is sometimes called the Sea of Genesaret). It may be that the ship belonged at or was going to Bethsaida, so the 12 landed there and then planned to go by foot to Capernaum (or vice-versa). Perhaps they had business first at Bethsaida and then went on to Capernaum, etc.

The disciples launched out, evidently in the evening or night sometime, but Jesus remained behind. The sea became quite contrary and the disciples were having a difficult time crossing. A great wind was blowing. Such storms are quite common on the Sea of Galilee and can arise quite

suddenly. Many of these men had made their living by fishing on this sea. so they knew as well as anyone how to deal with such a problem.

Verses 19,20

15. Describe how Jesus met them.

Jesus walks on the sea.

Other accounts say this happened in the fourth watch (3 AM to 6:AM). When they were about 3 or 4 miles from shore, Jesus came walking on the water. Mark adds Jesus would have passed them by. We are not told why. Perhaps it simply means He was going faster than they were and the result would have been to pass them, had He not slowed down to approach them.

In any case it is amazing enough that He could even stand on the water. That we might know without question the impossibility of this event by natural means, we are told they were 3 or 4 miles toward the middle of a sea. The disciples knew this sea well and were well aware that no one could possibly stand there. And yet Jesus was able, not only to stand without sinking, but even to walk and move faster than the boat did!

The disciples saw Him and could think of no explanation other than it was a ghost (Matthew's account). So they were frightened and cried out. Jesus, however, comforted them assuring them it was simply He, and telling them not to be afraid.

Other accounts tell us that Peter asked to be allowed to duplicate what Jesus was doing. He wanted to walk on the water to Jesus. Jesus granted the wish and Peter began walking on the water to Jesus. Despite initial success, Peter began to see the wind and the sea and he began to sink. He called out to the Lord to save Him, which Jesus did. However, Jesus rebuked Him for His little faith and His doubting.

We might criticize Peter for his lack of faith. However, the other disciples did not even attempt what he did, and likely most of us would not either. And often we fail in what we do attempt for the same basic reason that he did — lack of faith.

Verse 21

16. What details are given here and in the other accounts that demonstrate the miraculous nature of this event?

17. Application: What lessons can we learn from this event?

Jesus enters the boat, and the journey ends.

Other accounts state that, when Peter and Jesus entered the boat, the wind ceased. Then the apostles worshipped Jesus for His power, saying he was the Son of God (Matthew's account). We are told that they then immediately arrived at their destination.

Once again note how the writers carefully give us sufficient details that we cannot successfully deny that a miracle occurred. Many want to say this event was just a legend. But such a view accuses the witnesses of simply lying. They say they were in the middle of the sea, and in a storm at that. Jesus walked to them and could walk faster than they could row. Peter also walked on the sea briefly, and Jesus saved him when he sank. These men were experienced sailors on this sea and would not have been fooled by fakery. Their only other explanation was that they were seeing a ghost. Yet when they realized it was Jesus, they were so amazed that they worshipped Him. Furthermore, as soon as Jesus entered the boat, the storm ceased and they arrived at their destination.

This miracles teaches several things:

(1) As with all miracles we see the power of Jesus, confirming His claims and His teaching as being from God.

(2) We see His power over the elements. He created them, surely He can control them. He can use them in ways no mere human could ever do.

(3) We see His power to save. Just as He could save Peter from the sea, so He can save us from sin. When we sink in sin, as we all do, we must appeal to Him to save us.

(4) We see that failure in God's service is due to a lack of faith. As it was in Peter's case, so it is whenever we fall into sin. If we had faith enough we could endure every challenge. We sin when we lack the faith and fail to remain faithful.

Teaching about Proper Priorities and the Bread of Life — 6:22-71

Verses 22-24

18. On the next day, what did the multitudes realize had happened?

19. What did they do and where did they go?

The multitude seeks Jesus.

The next day the multitudes realized that Jesus was gone. They had seen that the disciples left, but Jesus had not entered the boat. Since there was no other boat, they had apparently assumed He was still there, so they had not left. However, other boats had come near the place, so they apparently concluded that He had left. So, when they finally realized He was really gone, they also took boats and came to Capernaum looking for Him (perhaps the point is that they left in the boats from Tiberias).

This confirms that the leaving of Jesus was miraculous or at least unexplainable to the people.

The rest of the chapter deals with their motives in following Jesus and the instructions He gave them as a result.

Verses 25,26

20. What question did the multitudes ask Jesus and what events occasioned the question?

21. What did Jesus say was the people's motive for seeking Him?

22. What lesson can we learn from this about the purpose of the feeding of the 5000?

Jesus rebukes the people for not valuing the real meaning of His miracle.

The multitude found Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum (see v59). There they asked Him when He had come there. This was a natural question. However, Jesus ignored it and went on to the question that was of greater importance: their **motive** for seeking Him. These people had seen His miracle of feeding thousands. As we will see, they wanted more such food. Knowing their hearts (2:24,25), Jesus knew their motives. The subsequent discussion demonstrated that He was correct about their motives.

The fundamental point of the miraculous feeding – as with all of Jesus' miracles – was that it proved Jesus to be the Son of God in whom they should place their trust that He could save them from their sins. But the people were not interested in the spiritual significance of this sign. They sought a means of material gain, prosperity, and advancement of their goals for an earthly kingdom. Their view was that, if Jesus could so provide food, He could surely provide everything needed for a powerful kingdom of great material prosperity. But this was not why Jesus had come, so He had refused to let them make Him king and had left (v15ff). Now they found Him and immediately wanted physical provisions again. They had an attitude problem, and Jesus dealt with it in no uncertain terms.

Such events ought to teach us not to be surprised when people today still try to make the kingdom of Jesus into a pursuit for physical and material benefits. Premillennialists still insist that He came to establish an earthly kingdom and, having failed to do it because the people rejected Him, He will come again and do it. And they still view that kingdom as an earthly paradise of incredible material, earthly prosperity. But this passage shows that Jesus could have set up an earthly kingdom when He came the first time, had He wanted to. The people wanted it and were

willing to follow Him to that goal. They rejected Him because He **would not do it!** It is just the opposite of what premillennialists say.

And still others follow Jesus for “loaves and fishes” — material benefits. Faith healers promise people physical healing and solutions to all kinds of earthly problems if they will just send a donation to the faith healer. So, the faith healer views the message of Christ as a means of material gain for himself. And he succeeds only because the people who follow him also view the gospel as a means of their own material benefits, healing, and prosperity. And all of this occurs because these people, exactly like the people in John 6, see mainly the material benefit to come from miracles. They still fail to recognize the real spiritual purpose of miracles.

Again, modern “Social Gospel” advocates, both in denominations and in “churches of Christ,” say the church must minister to people’s physical needs and interests in order to attract them to the gospel and salvation. So, churches offer welfare programs, entertainment, recreation, parties, fun and games, kitchens, gymnasiums, plays, camps, and, of course, physical meals. This, we are told, will draw the crowds, then they can be taught about Jesus. Yet, in this passage Jesus Himself refused to do the very thing that Social Gospel advocates claim we ought to do today! He could have had huge crowds to teach, had He continued to feed them. But He refused and the crowds left! Once again, He did the opposite of what people today say ought to be done.

This context does not primarily relate to the church, but with Jesus as an individual. Yet, the principle has some relationship to the reign of the king (v15). Above all, it teaches us what should be important to Jesus’ followers.

Why then did Jesus even feed the 5000 to begin with, if He did not want them to become interested in physical food? His point here is that it was a miracle — a sign which showed to them that His claims were true. They should have seen in it evidence that He was the Son of God who could tell them how to live for God. When He had given the sign, its purpose was accomplished and did not need to be continually repeated. When people wanted it repeated just for their material gain, they demonstrated that they had missed the point of the miracle they had seen. If they saw nothing higher than the physical benefit of the miracle, then there was no point in giving more miracles. So, Jesus refused to do more for them.

Note it carefully. Miracles were done only when they would achieve the higher purpose of giving people reason to believe in Jesus, in God, and in God’s inspired message. When that purpose would not be served, miracles were not done. This ought to prove once and for all that the physical benefit (or harm) done by a miracle was never the main point of doing miracles. And when people today think that the physical effect was the main purpose of the miracle, they make the same mistake for which Jesus severely rebuked this multitude.

Verse 27

23. What did Jesus say they should do instead of seeking physical food? Explain the meaning.
24. List other passages that discuss the importance of spiritual matters compared to physical.
25. Case Study: Some churches use carnal appeals - such as meals, entertainment, or recreation – to attract people to attend church activities. What application would Jesus’ statements here have to such a practice?

Spiritual food must take precedence over material food.

This is just one of numerous passages showing us that spiritual concerns ought to be far greater to us than material, earthly interests. This issue of priorities — what is really important in life — is an issue repeatedly discussed in Scripture. See Romans 8:5-8; 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 10:3,4; 4:16-18; John 6:63; Luke 12:15-21; Colossians 3:1,2; Matthew 6:19-33; 10:34- 39; 16:24-27; 1 Timothy 4:8; 6:6-19.

Jesus here used “food” to represent that which we pursue as essential or important in life. Food is a necessity. These people wanted Him to provide it for them free. But Jesus said that material food is not as important as “food” which provides eternal life, referring to those things that are essential to achieve spiritual goals. Just as “daily bread” in Matt. 6:11 stands for all physical needs, so “food” here stands for whatever we consider to be essential and important goals in life. In many ways, the discussion is similar to the discussion with the Samaritan woman about living water in John 4.

Physical bread is needed. Jesus does not deny that, and other passages show it is proper to work for it (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10, etc.). But these people were so interested in it that they missed what was really important: the spiritual significance of Jesus’ miracle. When material interests become so important that we fail to recognize or fulfill spiritual concerns, then our priorities are wrong and the principle of this verse rebukes us, just as it did these Jews.

Physical interests are relatively unimportant because they perish. No matter what they are, they are temporary and pertain to this life only. Someday they will cease to be of any concern at all. But spiritual interests will affect us for eternity. The pursuit of spiritual goals will lead to eternal consequences. That is why they are more important.

Jesus can provide for these spiritual necessities and blessings, just as He had provided the food for the 5000. They should have seen that in His miracle, but instead they saw only the physical gain they could get from Him.

Jesus was “sealed” by the Father in that the Father put His stamp of approval on Jesus. A seal, in that day, was an official validation, like a signature on an official document today. The Father validated Jesus’ claims and demonstrated that Jesus had power from God to provide for the people’s spiritual needs. He did this by miracles, such as the feeding of the 5000.

Hence, the people should have seen the miracle as a “seal” or proof that Jesus was from God and could provide for their spiritual needs. Instead, they saw it only a means of physical gain and sought more such material benefits. Jesus recognized this, rebuked them, and refused to do as they wanted.

Examples today in which people overemphasize physical interests are numerous. Under v26 (above) we listed some. Other examples are people who are too wrapped up in making money, enjoying pleasure, sports and recreation, parties, physical beauty, earthly power and fame, etc. None of these are inherently wrong of themselves. The Bible never teaches us to have no concern for them. But any or all are wrong when they become the main goal of life or when they hinder our fulfilling the spiritual requirements Jesus wants us to emphasize.

Note that Jesus here makes clear that we must “labor” to obtain the food that is essential to eternal life. Most people realize that we must work to obtain physical necessities. But many believe that eternal life can be obtained by “faith only” without obeying Divine commands. Jesus here makes clear that receiving eternal life does indeed require doing work.

Verses 28,29

26. What question did the people ask next, and what answer did Jesus give (vv 28,29)?

27. Case Study: Some churches teach that we are saved by “faith alone,” so “works” are not necessary to salvation. What application would these verses have to that doctrine?

The people ask about working the works of God.

The Jews had not really understood or been convinced by Jesus’ teaching. But He had told them to work for the food that abides to eternal life, so they asked Him, in effect, how to do that: what should they do to work for God? We will see that they were still hoping that the answer they received would result in a way for them to obtain material gain. In effect, they were asking what they could do to get Jesus to continue to give them physical blessings.

But instead of telling them how to obtain physical benefits, Jesus gave a spiritual answer. The work God wanted them to do was to believe in Jesus, whom God sent. This called their attention back to the issue. What God wanted, and what He had sought to accomplish by the miracle, was to get the people to believe in Jesus. That is what they needed to do to receive eternal life (cf. v27; 3:16; etc.). They had ignored the real purpose of the miracle and had sought material advantage. So, when they asked how to work for God, Jesus called them back to the need for faith. This is not the only work God requires. But in many ways it is the most basic one, and especially here it was the one these Jews needed most.

Faith as a “work.”

Note that Jesus Himself said that believing in Him is a “work.” 1 John 3:23 confirms that believing is a command we must obey. It is folly, therefore, for “faith only” advocates to argue that there is nothing to do to be saved, you don’t have to obey commands or do any works, just believe in Jesus! If you don’t have to do any works or obey commands, then you don’t have to believe, since believing is plainly taught in Scripture to be a work or command we must obey. But if we must work this work to be saved, then works are essential to salvation. The only question that remains is to learn what other works, if any, are essential.

Some say the “work of God” means it is a work God does in us — we believe because He chooses for us to believe. However, (1) 1 John 3:23 still says believing is a command we must obey. (2) They had asked what must “we” do that “we” may work the works of God. Jesus was telling them what man must do, not what God does. (3) Compare the expression “work of God” to 1 Cor. 15:58, which tells us to continue in the “work of the Lord.” It is not the work God does, but the work He has appointed for us to do. (4) If our believing is entirely the work of God, then He would be responsible for those who do not believe and are therefore lost eternally. But Jesus said many will be lost, so that would make God a respecter of persons who saves some but not others.

Hence, Jesus here proves there is something for people to do to please God. Faith here refers to obedient faith, and it requires other acts of obedience in order to be a true saving faith, as discussed in John 3:16 (see notes there). The question then is simply what work is required.

For more information about salvation by faith only vs. obedient faith, see our article on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

Verses 30-33

28. What Old Testament miracle did the people remind Jesus about? What were they still wanting Jesus to do (vv 30-33)?
29. What response did Jesus give? (Thought question: What is the bread of God that Jesus refers to? Cf. vv 35ff.)

The people seek manna like Moses had given.

Jesus had said the people should believe in Him, but they were not willing to give up their idea of seeking material benefits. So, they asked Him to do a sign so they can believe in Him. If God expected them to work for Him (vv 26-29), then they wanted Jesus to first do a work for them. And they were even willing to volunteer a suggestion for the kind of sign they would like: they reminded Jesus that Moses gave them manna. Lo and behold, they were right back where they had been at the beginning of the discussion: they wanted food to eat! This is exactly where Jesus had said they were, and this is exactly what He had rebuked them for — they wanted miracles to provide physical food! (See on vv 26,27.)

Note the audacity of the people. First, they were repeating the very error Jesus had just rebuked them for. But just as bad, immediately after Jesus had shown them a great miracle, they came to Him and called for another miracle so they could believe. If they would not believe when He first miraculously gave them bread, why would they believe if He gave them more bread?

And they not only wanted a miracle, they wanted to be able to decide for themselves what kind of miracle God should give!

Jesus first corrected a misunderstanding. The manna Israel had received in the wilderness ultimately was not from Moses but was from the Father in heaven. Like all miracles, God provided it, not primarily to meet their need, but to cause them to believe in God and in God's messenger Moses. If they were going to ignore the essential purpose of miracles, there was surely no reason for Jesus to do another. And further, God is the giver, so God gives what He believes to be best for the people. It is not up to the people to tell God what gifts to give, when, or why.

The bread from heaven

Then Jesus explained the blessing that the people really needed and that God had chosen to give. It was "bread" from heaven, but not the physical bread like manna they were pursuing. The "bread" was the One whom God had sent to provide life for the world. This, of course, was Jesus. Jesus is the "bread" throughout this discussion that people must "eat" or partake of. They do this by believing in Him with an obedient faith. If they do so, He provides for them spiritually and gives them eternal life just like physical food sustains physical life.

The people were still thinking physically instead of spiritually, so they missed Jesus' point completely and the discussion broke down till they finally ended up rejecting Him and leaving Him. But the critical issue throughout the rest of the chapter has been defined here: spiritual issues and needs vs. material ones.

Verses 34-36

30. What is the "bread of life," and how do we partake of it?

31. What is the benefit of partaking of this bread? (Thought question: How is Jesus like bread? Notice this theme as it continues through the chapter.)

Jesus as the bread of life

Jesus had said that the Father gives bread from heaven and gives life to the world, so the people asked to receive this bread always. They were obviously still thinking in terms of physical or material gain. And they were not satisfied with the one time Jesus fed them. They wanted food all the time (evermore – KJV)!

V35 is a key verse in understanding the whole discussion. Jesus told them what the bread is that they must eat, and He told how they should partake of it so as to meet their needs. Later in the chapter He spoke again of people eating His flesh and drinking His blood (vv 52-55). Some think that refers to the Lord's Supper; but when you understand the context it becomes clear that the reference is not primarily to the Lord's Supper.

What is the bread: Jesus plainly stated, "I am the bread of life" (cf. vv 48,51). And He is not only food, but also drink, for those who partake of Him will never hunger or thirst. We must both eat His flesh and drink His blood (vv 53ff). There can be no successfully denying it: the bread Jesus here refers to is Jesus Himself.

In what way is Jesus like bread? Compare to vv 27,32,33. The bread of life is that which comes down from God in heaven (like manna — vv 31,32,49) and gives men what is necessary for them to have eternal life (cf. vv 33,40,47,50,51). Physical bread is a gift from God (James 1:17; Matt. 6:11) that provides what is necessary to physical life. Likewise, the bread of life (Jesus) came from God in heaven to provide what we need for spiritual and eternal life.

What does He provide that we need in order to have eternal life? Mainly He provides forgiveness of sins by His death on the cross (v51). But He also gives instruction regarding how we can receive forgiveness (vv 44,45) and how we should continue to live to remain in God's favor — the words of eternal life (vv 63,68). Associated with this are hope, joy, peace, and all the blessings that come with being forgiven and having the hope of eternal life (Eph. 1:3). Compare this to the discussion in John 4 about Jesus as the water of life.

What did He say we must do to partake of this bread? If we believe in Him and come to Him, we will never hunger or thirst. Hence, we partake of the bread by believing in Him and coming to Him (obeying Him). We eat the bread by becoming Christians and remaining faithful to Him. This requires us to first learn about Him (vv 44,45), by the words of life (vv 63,68).

When we believe in Jesus and obey His word, our sins are forgiven and we partake of the life He offers. As we continue to believe and to live in His word, we continue to have the hope of eternal life. He provides all this, and we partake of it by serving Him according to His will. The Lord's Supper is involved only indirectly in that it is a memorial to Jesus, who is the real bread of life.

These people had said they wanted the bread from God out of heaven; but Jesus knew they did not really want it, because they refused to believe in Him. We cannot have these blessings unless we believe in Him, and they refused to appreciate Him as the giver of spiritual blessings; instead, they insisting on material benefits. Jesus was again speaking spiritually and they, as they so often did, were thinking physically. This would lead them eventually to reject Him and desert Him (v66).]

Note that this is the first of many "I am" passages in John, in which Jesus uses some physical item to teach a spiritual lesson about Himself ("I am the vine," "I am the good shepherd," etc.). Watch for others as the book proceeds (8:12; 10:7,11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). None of them were meant to be taken physically. All taught spiritual lessons.

Verse 37

32. What promise did Jesus give in v37? Explain it.

We must come to Jesus to receive His blessings.

We partake of Jesus as the "bread of life" (and thereby have the hope of eternal life) by **believing** in Him and **coming** to Him (v35). But some people (such as these Jews) will not come because they do not believe (v36). However, all whom the Father gives to Jesus will come; He will not cast them out but will raise them up (vv 39,40).

This is not teaching unconditional Calvinistic predestination. The Father has not unconditionally chosen certain individuals, regardless of their character, conduct, or will, and compelled them to accept Jesus regardless of what they want. He has simply declared what **kind** of person can and cannot come to Jesus.

Compare vv 44,45. Those who come to Jesus are those whom the Father draws to Him, and these are the ones to be raised up. But **how** does the Father draw them? He draws them when they **hear, learn, and are taught from the Father**. Then they must **believe** (v40). So, it is by the message of the gospel that the Father draws people and gives them to Jesus. God has determined that He wants to give to Jesus the kind of people who are willing to listen, understand, and have obedient faith. Here Jesus implies that these Jews would not be included, because they did not believe in Him (v36).

Many other passages say that God wants all men to be saved, so Jesus died for all and the gospel is to be preached to all (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4,6; John 3:16; Heb. 2:9; Mark. 16:15,16; Matt. 28:19). It is this gospel that calls men to Jesus (2 Thess. 2:14). The gospel is the word of eternal life (John 6:63,68).

Hence, the Father has chosen to give to Jesus all men who are willing, in response to the gospel, to demonstrate obedient faith. God wants all men to do this and has offered the gospel to all. But the only ones who are given to Jesus are the ones who (by their choice) choose to believe and obey, thereby coming to Him.

These are not cast out, but this is not talking about whether or not they can ever be lost. Many verses show that it is possible for a child of God to so sin as to be lost (see notes on John 3:36). The point is that Jesus will not refuse to accept any who come to Him in obedient faith, having been thereby given to Him by the Father. These unbelieving Jews would not come. But

those who are willing to come need not fear rejection. All who will meet the conditions will be received and accepted. Those who will not meet the conditions are the ones who will be rejected. And this may include some who first become His disciples, but then turn away from Him.

For further information about election and predestination and about “once saved, always saved,” see our articles about those subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

Verses 38-40

33. Where did Jesus come from, and for what purpose did He come (v38)?

34. What was the Father’s will for Jesus, and what was His will for those who believe in Him (vv 39,40)?

Jesus came to do His Father’s will and give eternal life to those who believe.

Jesus had not come to do His own will, but the will of the Father. This does not imply that their wills would otherwise conflict and differ. Jesus possessed Deity, so He and the Father and the Holy Spirit are in complete agreement in all things. But on earth Jesus was also a man who had come to learn (experience) obedience. He had totally submitted Himself to obey His Father like we must (see notes on 5:19,30).

What was the Father’s will? Regarding Jesus, the Father’s will was that He not lose any of these ones whom the Father had given Him. All who truly believe (obedient faith) in Him would receive eternal life and be raised up at the last day (obviously, by implication, the resurrection of life — 5:28,29). This is why He would not refuse to accept anyone who would come to Him according to the Father’s will (v37). To refuse such an one would be to condemn him to be lost. Jesus could not do that, because it would not be in harmony with the will of the Father whom He came to please.

Again, the fact the Father does not want any of these to be lost does not mean it is impossible for them to be lost. As in 3:36, these can so sin as to be lost (see notes there). But God does not **want** this, just as He does not want **anyone** to be lost (2 Peter 3:9; etc.). Yet, He must allow it when people return to sin even after conversion. The eternal condemnation of any soul is contrary to the desires of the Father, but neither He nor the Son will force salvation on anyone.

The point here is that **Jesus** is not going to be the cause of such people being lost. If they are lost it will be the result of their own doing, not because Jesus did not desire to accept them or in some other way rejected them. Jesus is not here discussing what can possibly happen to the people if they change their minds and become unfaithful. He is just discussing the fact that He Himself will follow the Father’s will. Note that the very context itself specifies conditions men must meet to be saved: they must see Jesus as He is, must believe in Him and come to Him (vv 37-40) by obedience. Jesus cannot accept people contrary to these conditions. But He is willing to receive all who will meet the conditions. Hence, if men are lost, it will not be Jesus’ fault or because He failed to do as He should.

The expression “see the Son” also has a spiritual emphasis and carries the idea of truly seeing the real significance of who He is. It requires a recognition of the truth of His claims and a willingness to accept them as truth. Only then can one really see the Son. When one believes in Jesus (obedient faith) on the basis of this understanding, then He can have eternal life. (Cf. 12:45.)

And also note how Jesus here plainly states that He has come down from heaven. This claim too is often repeated in the book of John and especially in this immediate discussion (vv 33,38,41,50,51,58). And how can it be true, unless He is much more than just an ordinary man. Nor is He an angel, so He must be Divine.

And note also how He again plainly states that He has the power to raise men from the dead (cf. 5:28,29). Who could have this power except God? While Jesus does not here directly state His Deity, properly understood his words can mean nothing less.

And finally, Jesus' reference to the "last day" is also common in John. It refers to the day of judgment on which all men will be raised from the dead. This shows that the ultimate reward, for which Jesus' true disciples work, is not a physical blessing to be received in this life (like the food the people sought). Rather, it is a blessing in eternity after this life and after death. To receive it requires a resurrection from the dead.

Jesus is trying every way He can to get the people to see that His purpose here is spiritual and pertains to eternal life and man's relationship to God. They completely miss the point when they emphasize physical food. And so do all others who fail to understand the spiritual nature of His life, His gospel, and His kingdom.

Verses 41,42

35. What complaint did the people raise against Jesus (vv 41,42)?

36. Based on what we have learned, what mistake did the people make that led them to make this complaint?

The Jews doubt Jesus' heavenly origin.

These Jews, just as Jesus had said, began to show their unbelief. They objected to the fact He said **He** was bread come down from heaven. Remember, they wanted physical blessings when they asked for bread from heaven. When Jesus did not give that but instead offered Himself, they began to lose interest. He was offering something of infinitely greater value than what they sought, but they were not interested.

In particular, they objected to His claim to have come down from heaven (vv 33,38). This was a claim to Deity or at least to Divine origin. But the Jews claimed He could not have come from heaven, because they knew His family, his father and mother. In this they assumed that His father was Joseph, so how could God be His Father and how could He have come from heaven (cf. 4:44; 5:18)? To them, He was just a physical man with a physical origin.

Their error, of course, was that Joseph was not Jesus' physical father, but only his adopted or earthly father. Jesus' real Father is the Father in heaven. He had been born of Mary by the miracle of the virgin birth so that Joseph was not really His Father (see Matt. 1 and Luke 1). Jesus is in reality eternal and Divine, having existed from eternity, created all things, and then come to earth in the form of a man (John 1:1-3,14, etc.).

But the people did not believe, mainly because they were looking for the wrong thing. They had seen His miracle; had they appreciated the miracle, they should have believed His message. Their skepticism shows they wanted something other than the truth from a messenger from God. They wanted food and an earthly kingdom – physical, earthly benefits. They saw in Him a physical man, they knew His origin (they thought), He did not give what they wanted, so they began a course that led them ultimately to reject Him altogether.

Verses 43-45

37. What must happen in order for a person to come to Jesus (vv 44,45)?

38. List two other passages showing that people need to learn and understand God's will to be saved.

39. Case Study: Calvinism teaches that people can only come to Jesus to be saved if the Holy Spirit directly calls them and compels them to believe and be saved. What can we learn about this doctrine from this context?

40. From this study, what can we conclude about the practice of infant baptism?

Jesus states the circumstances under which people can follow Him.

Jesus responded telling them not to so murmur among themselves. Then He simply returned to further discussion of how people come to Him. He had said they had eternal life and would be raised up at the last day (thereby partaking of Him as the bread of life) if they would believe (see vv 34-40). He here proceeds to show how people believe and thereby come to Him.

They cannot come to Him and be raised up unless the Father draws them. He draws them, as predicted in the prophets (Isa. 54:13), by being taught by God. So, Jesus said that those who come to Him are those who hear and learn. Note that those who do not hear and learn cannot come. This was the application to these Jews. They did not want Jesus' spiritual message. They wanted physical food and an earthly kingdom. The consequence was that they would not listen to the teaching, therefore they could not become true disciples.

Jesus' statement takes the mystery out of how the Father draws people and how He gives them to Jesus. It is done by the message of the gospel, which message is to be preached to all in the world (see notes on v37; cf. 12:32). The gospel is the power of God to save those who hear it and believe (John 8:31,32; Matthew 13:23; Romans 1:16; 10:13,14,17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:26,29,35; 9:6; 11:14; 18:8; Luke 6:46-49; 11:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Revelation 3:20). In so explaining, Jesus was telling these people that the bread and life He was describing were not physical. He was also telling them what they had to do to receive it, which was what they had asked Him to tell them (v28). But they would not listen, so they rejected Him and His message.

Note the implications of these verses for the doctrine of direct operation of the Holy Spirit, separate and apart from the word, in conversion of sinners. Jesus says here that the Spirit does not teach people directly nor come directly into their hearts apart from the word. Only by hearing and learning can they come to Jesus (see the examples of the eunuch, Saul, and Cornelius in Acts 8,9,10). The whole concept of Calvinistic election and direct action of the Holy Spirit in salvation is disproved here by Jesus' own direct statements.

Note also the consequences for the practice of infant baptism. "No one" can come unless they first learn and are taught. A baby cannot do this, so a baby cannot come. But then a baby does not need to come because he has no sins anyway (cf. Matt. 18:5).

Verse 46

41. Who has and has not seen the Father (v46)? Explain.

No one has seen the Father except Jesus.

Jesus added that no one had seen the Father except the One (Jesus) who had come from the Father (cf. on 1:18).

Why did Jesus add this? Perhaps to clarify that His statements did not mean that people needed to personally or directly be taught by the Father. Nobody could personally experience Him in that way. Or perhaps He was simply emphasizing that He was the bread of life because He was the only One who had seen the Father and so could tell them about His will. They could not know the true will of God any other way except through Him. That is why they needed Him and that is why He is the bread of life.

Note again the very direct claim of Jesus to a special relationship with God that no one else has. No one else has seen God as He has, so no one could know the Father's will as He knew it. All such claims are blasphemous, unless Jesus is the Christ, God in the flesh. No prophet or apostle ever made such claims. Only Jesus Himself.

Verses 47,48

42. What is the bread of life? Who can have eternal life (vv 47,48)?

Jesus is the bread of life who can give eternal life to those who believe.

These verses summarize and restate the points of vv 35-41 (see notes there). Jesus offers eternal life to all who believe in Him (cf. v40). He is the One who can give this life because He is the bread of life. Note that once again, as in v41, Jesus directly states that He is the bread to which He refers (cf. v35). He is the One that people must believe in to be saved. Once again, see the extreme character of His claims. Those who believe in Him can have eternal life! What mere man, even a prophet or apostle, would dare make such claims?

Again, the faith required is obedient faith (see notes on 3:16). And one “has everlasting life” as a promise or hope, not a present possession in this life (see on 3:36). Nothing here should be misconceived to teach salvation by “faith alone” or “once saved, always saved.”

Verses 49-51

43. How did Jesus’ “bread of life” differ from the manna Moses gave (vv 47-51)?

44. What did Jesus do so we could have life?

Jesus is greater bread than the manna.

This discussion had resulted because the Jews requested Jesus to give them bread from heaven like Moses gave manna (vv 30-34). Jesus here showed again that the bread He was offering them is both different from and better than the bread Moses gave. The point is spiritual bread vs. physical bread.

Those who ate the manna still died. It sustained them for a time in the wilderness, but they still died later. Those who ate of Jesus’ bread would not die but have eternal life. He was offering them something far greater than Moses’ manna, and they were rejecting it because they were thinking physically (vv 35-48).

Once again, Jesus clearly states that He is the living bread (cf. vv 35,41,48). And once again He clearly states that He came down from heaven (cf. vv 33,38). He just continues making bold claims and refusing to back down.

Again Jesus clarified that He was not talking about physical bread. The bread He offered is His flesh which He would give for the life of the world — i.e., His sacrifice on the cross (see notes on 3:16). This is what is necessary for men to be forgiven and have eternal life. And this is what men must “eat” (partake of). We do this by hearing about Him and believing. See notes on v35. The meaning is here clearly explained and should not be confused in vv 53ff with the Lord’s Supper.

Verses 52-55

45. What problem did the Jews have with Jesus’ statement, and what response did Jesus make (vv 52,53)?

46. Special Assignment: Explain how we can eat Jesus’ flesh and drink His blood. Keep it in context! Note vv 27,35,40-51.

47. What blessing may we have if we eat and drink of Jesus (vv 54,55)?

(Thought question: Is this talking *primarily* about partaking of the Lord’s Supper? What problems might we face if we misunderstood this point?)

We must eat Jesus’ flesh and drink His blood.

Jesus was trying to get the Jews to see the importance of their spiritual needs, instead of just thinking about their material interests. But they continued to think physically, so they could not understand how they could eat His flesh. So confused and upset were they that they actually quarreled among themselves about the meaning of Jesus’ statements.

Perhaps this relates to their knowledge that the Law forbade drinking blood or eating flesh with the blood still in it. But they are still missing the point of Jesus’ spiritual teaching.

He responded that, unless they ate His flesh and drank His blood, they don’t have life in them! He insisted that His flesh truly is food and His blood truly is drink, and if they would partake they could have eternal life and be raised up at the last day.

This seems confusing only if we take it out of context or if we try to think physically like these Jews were doing. Jesus had already explained repeatedly that He is the bread of life who came from heaven to give His life for men, that those who partake can have eternal life, and that they partake by hearing His word, believing in Him, and coming to Him (see vv 27,35,41-51).

Hence, Jesus’ statements should not be taken as mysterious, mystical, or even very confusing. He is simply saying that we must serve Him to receive the spiritual blessings He offers. We

must learn about Him, believe in Him, and obey Him; if we do, we will have the hope of eternal life and all other blessings that we need to receive that eternal life. This is just what is taught in multitudes of other passages. He speaks this way to these Jews because they were so insistent on emphasizing physical things, and he is trying to get them to emphasize spiritual things.

The Lord's Supper?

Some people think Jesus refers here to eating His flesh and drinking His blood in the Lord's Supper. The parallel is striking, but it just does not fit this context. The Lord's Supper is nowhere here. However, the view we have presented is not only in the context, it is the whole point of the context. The Lord's Supper is a **part** of serving Jesus, and in fact it is a memorial to His flesh and blood by which we have eternal life. But it is by no means the main point He is making here.

In fact, there are dangers in thinking He is mainly referring to the Lord's Supper. Some think we literally eat Jesus physical flesh and blood in the Lord's Supper. Others seem to think all they have to do is eat and drink the Lord's Supper and they will have eternal life. They put little or no emphasis on spiritual things during the week, but they drop in for 15 minutes to eat the Lord's Supper on Sunday. They may even leave and ignore the rest of the worship. But they think they are all right, because they ate Jesus' flesh and drank His blood!

All such ideas are just a variation of the same error the Jews were committing. They were oriented almost entirely toward physical matters — an earthly kingdom, outward ritual and appearance, etc. Likewise, some pervert this passage to think, if they can just go through the physical ritual of eating some Lord's Supper, they can go on their way spending the rest of their lives emphasizing physical matters and still be pleasing to God. The passage is really showing that spiritual service to God must occupy our thinking and our lives if we are to have eternal life. And Jesus deliberately stated this in such a way that people who are not willing to be spiritually-minded would reject His teaching.

Verses 56-59

48. What other blessing do we receive if we eat and drink of Jesus in v56?

49. List a few other verses about abiding in Jesus.

50. Application: Explain what it means to abide in Jesus? In what sense are we in Him?

51. In what sense did Jesus live because of the Father? (Did the Father create Jesus? In what way did Jesus receive life because of the Father? Note Hebrews 10:5.)

52. Where did this discussion occur?

Jesus repeats the blessing of eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

Jesus continued to emphasize the need to feed on Him if people are to live. Again, He said that His food is superior to the manna, because people who ate manna still died; but people who partake of the food He offers will live forever (cf. vv 31-34). Note again how this ties this teaching back into the previous discussion. There just can be no doubt that Jesus is continuing to say what He had said throughout the discussion.

He adds that, if we eat His flesh and drink His blood we abide in Him and He in us. Again, this is not physical. He is speaking spiritually, and it perverts His whole point to make this physical as a literal bodily indwelling.

What does it mean to abide in Jesus and have Him abide in us? Such expressions are used repeatedly in the Bible (especially John's writings) to describe the Father and Son dwelling in one another, them and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, us dwelling in them, etc. The clearest passages show that these expressions simply refer to spiritual fellowship or oneness, united spiritually instead of being alienated from one another. The point is that, in sin we are separated from God. When our sins are forgiven by Jesus (i.e., when we eat of His flesh and drink His blood by believing and obeying Him), then we are united again with God (He abides in us, etc.). See John 17:20-23; 15:1-6; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 5:17; 1 John 1:3,6,7; 2:3-6; 4:14-16; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19,20; Rom. 8:9; Eph. 3:17; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3,4; John 14:10,11,20; 10:37,38; etc.

Can we have this fellowship just by eating the Lord's Supper? No. The Lord's Supper is a memorial that we can partake of, because we have the fellowship; as such it is an outward expression of our fellowship (1 Cor. 10:16,17). But partaking of the Lord's Supper does not put us in fellowship. Believing and serving Jesus are what gives us access to this fellowship. Understanding this can make the Lord's Supper more meaningful. It is a memorial in which we symbolize the fact that we are in Jesus' fellowship, because we have been eating His flesh and drinking His blood by serving Him. But the memorial itself is not what puts us into His fellowship.

Note that Jesus states again that He has come down from heaven (see on vv 33,38).

His statement that He lives because of the Father does not mean the Father created Jesus. We have already learned that Jesus is eternal (see on vv 1-3). Rather, the reference is the fact that the Father sent Jesus from heaven to earth to live as a man – see the first part of v57. This is the sense in which Jesus lived because of the Father. He came to earth to live as a man, because the Father sent Him (Hebrews 10:5).

Note that He proceeds to say that those who feed on Him, will live because of Him. Does this mean that He will create them or physically bring them into existence? Does it mean those who don't feed on Him will not come into existence? Obviously not. They already existed, but He would give them life in a sense they did not already have. So, Jesus existed eternally, but the Father gave Him life on earth as a man so He could accomplish His purpose here.

We are told again that this teaching was done in Capernaum, in the synagogue.

Verses 60-62

53. What did the disciples think at this point (v60)?

54. What else did Jesus say might offend them (vv 61,62)?

(Think: Why might this also offend them?)

The people are offended at Jesus' teaching.

Up to this point, it was the Jews who were confused by Jesus' teaching. But at this point even some of those who were disciples thought this was a hard saying that they could not understand. In reality, it is not so hard if you think spiritually and understand what Jesus' purpose here was all about. But if you think physically, which the disciples were also often guilty of, then it surely is confusing. And we have seen that some disciples still today stumble at Jesus because they are over-emphasizing physical things instead of spiritual.

Jesus could read their hearts (2:24,25), so He knew about their complaints. He asked if they were offended by His teaching. If so, how much more difficulty would they have if they saw Him ascend back up to heaven. They were stumbling because He said He came from heaven to give His flesh that the world might have life. This is not what even His disciples expected. They anticipated an earthly ruler who would provide physical benefits like those the Jews were requesting. They too would find it hard to understand His spiritual emphasis. What if He were to leave and go back to heaven, as He eventually did without having established an earthly kingdom? Would they not find that even more offensive to their preconceptions? But if we understand His purpose here was primarily spiritual, we have no such problems.

Verse 63

55. Explain the contrast in v63. How do Jesus' words related to this (note v68)?

Jesus words give spirit and life. The flesh is unprofitable by comparison.

This verse, along with vv 26,27, shows the main emphasis Jesus was trying to make, and also shows why the Jews had such trouble accepting His points. Physical things, in the long run, are of no great importance. What really matters are those things of the Spirit that pertain to eternal life. See references under vv 26,27 for other passages that make this point.

Physical life is not as important as spiritual life. Spiritual life can be achieved because Jesus eventually died to give forgiveness. The Spirit then revealed the meaning of all this in the gospel,

which Jesus was already proclaiming. This was a spiritual message that can give spiritual life. This is what we need to emphasize.

It is essential that we appreciate the spiritual nature of Jesus' work and message. If we do not, then like the Jews we will end up rejecting some or all of His real value. We will pervert the purpose of the church or the purpose of our own lives. The result will be a material emphasis that will keep us from eternal life. See examples listed under vv 26,27.

This verse is critical in our understanding of Jesus' message here. He draws the message to a conclusion at the same point where He began it: by showing that His message and His purpose here was spiritual in nature, not primarily physical.

Verses 64,65

56. What did Jesus already know?

57. Where else did Jesus say what He says in v65?

Jesus knew that some claimed to follow Him but lacked true faith.

Jesus again pointed out that some of them did not really believe. This was the real problem that caused them to reject His teaching. What is more, one of them would betray Him, and He already knew even who that was (see notes on vv 70,71). He knew the hearts of all men and knew what would eventually happen (2:24f).

It is folly to hold, as some do, that Jesus did not know the Jews would reject Him and had to change His plans when they did. He knew from the beginning who really did not believe, and He knew what would happen as a result. It was all part of the plan, not contrary to the plan.

Knowing some would not believe, He had said that no one could come unless it be granted them by the Father. See notes on v37. Again, the point is not unconditional predestination. The point is that God had predetermined that the only people who could come to Jesus were those who heard of Him and believed in Him with obedience (cf. vv 44,45). No others will receive His blessings. He would like to have all men believe and be blessed. He offers the opportunity to all men, but each person must decide for himself what choice he will make. But Jesus knew some would disbelieve, and God's will requires that unbelievers cannot come to Jesus. And He knew what choices Judas would make, but He never compelled him to make those choices.

Verse 66

58. What finally happened to many of these people (v66)?

59. Application: What lessons and applications can we learn from this?

Many disciples desert Jesus.

At the conclusion of the discussion, not only did many Jews reject His words, but even many disciples ceased following Him. This was no doubt sad and difficult, for the Lord has feelings too, and He grieves over man's sins.

Yet there is so much we can learn here.

(1) People, who at first seem interested in truth, often end up rejecting it. Some we try to teach will refuse to obey. But these were disciples! So there will be also disciples who will quit obeying. If it happened at the teaching of the Master Teacher, why should we think it will not happen when we teach the same truths? And why do people teach that it is impossible for a disciple to fall away and be lost?

(2) In fact, Jesus taught what He did **knowing** this would happen. He knew that many did not believe (v65) and that they were following Him from wrong motives (vv 26f). He deliberately and persistently confronted their errors, refusing to compromise or back down. The result was the loss of many disciples.

Yet many people today repeatedly claim that it is wrong for preachers to preach as Jesus did here. If we continue to emphasize truths that we know are offensive and objectionable to people, and if as a result some people refuse to be converted or others leave the church, other people

blame the preaching and say we “should not preach so hard.” They want the message toned down or even compromised or silenced in order to keep the people.

Jesus clearly did not agree with the view of “positive preaching.” He knew His message was offensive (v61), and the people thought He was preaching “hard sayings (v60), but He kept it up. Even after the people left, He did not apologize or try to draw them back, though He could easily have performed the kind of miracles they wanted.

His reason was that people could not be real disciples anyway, except on God’s terms. People, who will only stay if you compromise or change the truth, are not real converts anyway and will not really be saved in the end. They are just a hindrance and a bad influence on others. They should be given clear teaching so they have the chance to repent; but if they persist in error, then it is better for everyone if they leave. Jesus knew this. We need to learn it.

Jesus’ teaching was deliberately intended, not just to draw those who have the kind of hearts God is willing to save, but to also drive away those who are not willing to become true disciples. This is a bitter pill for many people to swallow, but passages like this one and many others show that this is the deliberate purpose of the gospel.

(3) People are dead wrong when they say we should use carnal appeals to attract people to the church and then try to convert them. When people primarily pursue material interests, they will never be satisfied with spiritual emphasis. They will stay only if you continue the physical attractions. They will never become spiritual, but will just leave when you start emphasizing the spiritual. Jesus knew that, so from the beginning He emphasized the spiritual, and He let them leave when they showed they did not want spiritual teaching.

Verses 67-69

60. What reason did Peter give why the apostles would not leave Jesus?

61. List a few other **passages** about the value or importance of the gospel.

Peter confesses Jesus and His word.

Seeing that so many other disciples had left, Jesus then challenged the twelve whether they too would leave. Impetuous Peter came out a hero this time. He said (by a rhetorical question) that there was nowhere else to go. Jesus had the words of eternal life (v63), and they believed that He was the Christ, the son of God (cf. Matt. 16:13-18).

In these simple, yet incredibly profound words, he stated the crux of the issue. The evidence (miracles, etc.) proved who Jesus is. If He is the Christ, why leave? Even if you don’t understand some things He says, stay and study till you do understand. But only by what He says do you have hope of eternal life. If you leave, you lose all hope of that reward.

This is the point the Jews missed about the feeding of the 5000. It was not primarily about food to relieve hunger. It was proof of who Jesus was. Peter got that point, even though He may have misunderstood much else. No doubt John records this whole discussion and Peter’s conclusion to convince us that we too need to believe who Jesus is.

Like the Jews, many people get this turned around. They examine Bible teaching and decide they don’t like it or they find it hard to understand. So they reject it, regardless of the evidence of miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and the resurrection, proving that it is really the message of God. Instead, like Peter, we should approach it the other way around. If an honest examination of the evidence proves the message to be from God, then we ought to accept Jesus and His message, regardless of our difficulties in understanding it. Then we ought to study it till we do understand it.

Many other verses show our need to hear and accept Jesus’ teachings in order to have eternal life. Jesus’ message has the power to save from sin and give eternal life. Without that message, we are eternally doomed. (See vv 44,45,63; Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 11:14.)

Verses 70,71

62. What problem did one of the apostles have? To whom did this refer (vv 70,71)?

Jesus reveals clearly that He knows one of them would betray Him.

Despite Peter's confession, which clearly stated the truth, Jesus knew that even among the twelve one was a devil (accuser, slanderer). He was so like Satan that Jesus identified the two together. One would turn against Him and betray Him. We are plainly told that He referred to Judas Iscariot.

Again, as in v64, Jesus knew the end from the beginning. He knew the hearts of all men. He knew what the final result would be, and even who would help bring it about. In particular, like the other people in this context, Judas was too attracted to material things, not appreciating spiritual things and eternal life. In the end he betrayed Jesus for money, but he was a thief long before that (12:4-6).

The gospel of John repeatedly demonstrates the error of those who think Jesus did not know ahead of time that He would be rejected and killed. He not only knew that He came to die, He knew the details of how it would happen and who would bring it about!

Yet this does not prove God compelled Judas against his will to be evil. Judas was a free moral agent with the power to choose, just like Adam and Eve and all the rest of us. But Jesus knew his heart and knew from the beginning what choice he would make (2:24,25).

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