

THE MAN WHO CHANGED THE WORLD - PART 6

I Am The Bread Of Life

Dr. John Allan Lavender

John 6:22-35, 51

The Man Who Changed The World looked searchingly at the group of people surrounding Him. So often they had misjudged Him. Even though He had tried to make it clear His Kingdom was not of this world and the values of which He spoke were spiritual, not political, they had always tried to compress Him into the restrictive mold of their own view of things. And now, it was happening again.

Yesterday, He had fed five thousand people with the lunch of a small boy. Five barley cakes and two tiny fish were all He had to start with. Phillip and some of the other disciples had shaken their heads in skepticism when He told them that would be enough. When would they learn that with God all things are possible? When would they accept the fact there is no limit to His power to provide?

Well, the twelve bulging basketfuls which were left over had succeeded in widening the crack in their doubt a little bit! But, for the moment, the real problem which confronted Him was not His slow-to-learn disciples, but the committee of representatives from the five thousand who had come to demand that He let them organize a revolt against Rome and set Him up as their King.

After all, as one of their leaders had reasoned, a man who can feed five thousand people with a few cakes and a couple of fish can solve every problem any nation could ever expect to have. Famine, the constant dread of desert people, would be a thing of the past. Truly, Jesus was the people's choice. They wanted to make Him King. If necessary, by force.

Well, Jesus had seen this coming while the disciples were collecting the surplus food. He had overheard some of the people murmuring that He must surely be the prophet who would come to save the world. That's why He quietly retreated into the seclusion of the mountainside. He had

already learned in His wilderness experience a man is most susceptible to a great temptation just after winning a great victory. So He chose to be alone where He could pray and meditate and build up the inner armament He suspected He would be needing soon.

And His worst fears had been realized. A large delegation from the crowd had borrowed boats and followed Him across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. And now they were plying Him with questions. Urging Him to let them make Him the key figure in their revolt against Rome.

The direct approach seemed like the only answer under the circumstances and so, after pausing a moment to take a long, slow look at each of them, He said something like this:

You people are not here because you understand the real meaning of what happened yesterday. You are here because you were hungry and got all the bread you could possibly eat. But the bread of this world does not satisfy. That's pretty evident because you are hungry again this morning. What I was trying to get over to you through what I did yesterday was the fact that I can give you bread that will sustain you forever. But you've missed the point completely.

And we often miss the point, too, don't we? We fail to realize, as William Barclay points out, "there are two kinds of hunger. A physical hunger which physical food can satisfy. And a spiritual hunger which physical food can never satisfy."

I don't know much about your economic situation this morning, but I do know that a person can be rich as Rockefeller and still have "a haunting dissatisfaction, an unsatisfied longing, incompleteness within his or her life."

Barclay's research reveals that

“in the years just after AD60, the luxury of Roman society was unparalleled. It was at that time the Romans served feasts of peacock's brains and nightingale's tongues. Meals costing the equivalent of thousands of dollars were not uncommon. One Roman lady was married in a robe so richly jeweled and gilded it cost the equivalent of a million dollars.”

There was a reason for all this, of course, and the reason was a deep, deep inner dissatisfaction. A hunger nothing superficial could satisfy.

As William Barclay points out,

“Those poor rich people sought for anything which could provide a thrill or add a new taste in life. They were appallingly rich and appallingly hungry at one and the same time.”

As I survey the affluent society of modern America and the neurotic fascination with things which preoccupies many of our people, it is obvious to me, as it must be to you, that the unsatisfied hunger suffered by the Romans still persists. And if there is an application for us in what Jesus' claim to be “The bread of life”, it is that our true hunger is a spiritual one. A hunger only Christ can satisfy.

There is, today, a desperate hunger on the part of many people for a sense of direction. They are confused about where life is going. Christ can satisfy their hunger, for He alone can say:

“I am the way.”

There is, today, a questing hunger on the part of many people for truth. Look at the number of people exploring a host of different philosophies. Christ can satisfy their hunger for He alone can say:

“I am the truth.”

“And (I) the truth shall set you free.”

There is, today, a great hunger for life. People are eager for a touch of joy and wonder. Christ can satisfy their hunger, for He alone can say:

“I am the life.”

“(And) I am come to give you life and that more abundantly.”

There is, today, a plaintive hunger on the part of many people for insight and understanding. Christ can satisfy their hunger, for He alone can say,

“I am the light.”

I am that power which renders all things visible including the awful truth about yourself and the awesome truth about God's gracious and forgiving love.

Behind that hunger which physical food and material stuff can temporarily relieve, lies a higher hunger. A hunger which is spiritual. A hunger only Christ can satisfy.

And why is that? Why is Christ the only answer? He Himself supplies the answer:

“Labor not for meat which perishes, but for that meat
(or soul food) which endures unto everlasting life
which the Son of man shall give to you: for him hath
God the Father sealed” (John 6:27).

There is profound meaning in that phrase: “for him hath God the Father sealed.” In a fine book called *Eastern Customs In Bible Lands*, the author explains:

“In the east, it was not the signature on a document
which authenticated it, but the seal. This was true in
commercial as well as political documents. The seal,
imprinted with the signet ring, made the document

valid.

“In Greek culture, it was the seal which authenticated a will. It was the seal on the mouth of a sack or crate which guaranteed the contents. From the highest to the humblest level of society, the seal was the sign of an object's true worth or authenticity.”

The reason Jesus can satisfy the true hunger of the human heart is that he is sealed by God. He is the truth about God incarnate in human flesh. To see Jesus is to see God. To receive Jesus is to receive God. To obey Jesus is to obey God.

You see, God alone can satisfy the highest hunger of your heart. He created you. He put a hunger inside you. A hunger for Himself. Your soul will be restless until you find your rest in Him. And that is possible by coming to Him through Jesus. For Jesus is

“the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by (Him.)” Him whom “the Father hath sealed.”

At that point, the people ask:

““What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘This is the work of God. That you believe in Him whom He hath sent” (John 6:28).

What does it mean to do God's work? the people asked. It means believing in Jesus whom God has sent.

To come at it another way, the way the writer of Hebrews put it, the one work God desires from us

is faith.

“Without faith it is impossible to please (God). For whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him” (Heb.11:6).

God wants you to trust Him. When you do, it establishes and expresses a whole new relationship between you and Him.

To quote Barclay again:

“Faith means being in such a relationship with God that we are friends with God...that we are not terrified at God any more...that God is not our enemy and our prosecutor but our Father and our friend...that we give God the trust and obedience and the submission which naturally arise from this new relationship.

“And how does believing in Jesus tie up with that? The whole essence of Christianity is that we would never have known that God is like this had not Jesus come and lived and died to tell us so? It is only that Jesus came to tell us that God is our Father. That God loves us. That God cares. That God wants nothing more than to forgive. And it's only because of that that the old strangeness and distance and enmity and suspicion of God are taken away and a new relationship is possible”

Well, one of the leaders of the crowd which confronted Christ stepped forward and said: (and I

paraphrase verse 30ff)

“We'd like to believe you, Jesus, but we need a sign to help us. For instance, Moses, in whom we all believe, gave our Father's manna in the desert. If you could repeat the spectacular event you pulled off yesterday, just to prove that it wasn't a fluke, of course, people will rally behind you in a minute and we will make you King of Israel.”

Jesus turned aside for a moment. They still didn't understand. Somehow they couldn't see it. Surely there must be a way to break through the thick wall of their narrow vision.

He turned back.

“Moses gave your Father's bread but it only satisfied their momentary needs. Today they are dead. But if you will eat the bread that I want to give you, you will never die.”

For a moment hope sparked within His breast as they pressed forward eagerly and said:

“Lord, give us this bread always.”

Jesus said softly,

“I am the bread of life. If any man eats this bread, he will live forever” (John 6:51).

TWO CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Many questions spring from this great “I AM” of Christ. Let me speak of just two: What is bread? And what is life?

In response to the first question, we must say, as Barclay does, that bread sustains life. Bread is the

staff of life. Bread stands for that without which life cannot go on. Bread represents the essential for life.

And what is life? Obviously, as Barclay points out,

“Jesus was moving them far beyond and above mere physical existence. He was trying to get them to see that life at its highest and best is spiritual. True life is a new relationship with God. A relationship made possible by Jesus. Without Him, and apart from Him, no one can ever know God as He truly is. Jesus not only is life, Jesus gives life. Without Him, life is impossible in the full sense of the word. Without Him, life may be existence, but it is not life as God meant it to be.

And because Jesus is life and gives life, and is essential to life, He is quite right in describing Himself as ‘the bread of life’. For He is that without which real life can neither begin or go on.”

But once we know Him, and accept Him, and receive Him, all the unsatisfied longings...all the insatiable desires...all the higher hungers of the human heart have the possibility of being filled.

If we really get hold of Jesus, or better yet, if Jesus really gets hold of us, those hungers are filled. Those hungers are met. Our restless soul finds rest. Our lifeless spirit is quickened.

Life is in Jesus and is there for the taking and the refusing.

“I am the bread of life.”, said Jesus, “If any man eat this bread he will live forever” (John 6:51).

What happened then has been happening ever since. Jesus made it perfectly clear He was talking about their relationship to Him personally, in the clean, clear, concise language of scripture:

“From that time on, many of His peoples withdrew
and walked with Him no longer” (John 6:66).

They were the first of a brood which modern missionaries in Asia call “Rice Christians”. These are people who make a surface profession of Christ because it means they will have all the benefits of the mission compound. Rice to eat when they're hungry. Shelter and clothing when they're in need. But when the chips are down and the hour of crises come, they turn coat and run. They want the benefits of Christ without really having Christ and without accepting the demands He imposes on them.

Their problem? They never really met Jesus. They were inoculated with *churchianity* and were never introduced to *Christianity*.

This brings us face to face with the key thought in this great “I AM” of Jesus.

THE NECESSITY OF APPROPRIATION

In the plainest possible language, Jesus said, *you must eat me*. That is, in the most intimate personal way I must become part of you. I must dwell within you. I must be given a chance to express my life through you. I must be appropriated. I must be given a chance to get inside you where I can touch the control centers of your mind, emotion and will.

“If any man *eat* this bread he shall live...”

People may be within arm's length of a mountain of food, but if they do not make some of it their own by eating it, they will starve to death. That's is the great truth Jesus couched in these simple words:

You must “eat” this bread if you would live. You
must appropriate My life and make it your own.

That does not mean you must take communion in order to be saved. One of satan's most clever devices has been to confuse the issue by substituting a physical act for spiritual reality. It is much easier to enter a church somewhere, eat a wafer and drink a sip of grape juice and go ones' way than it is to batter down the barricade of self-will which we have erected around our heart so we can enter into the intimacy of a personal experience with Christ. It is much easier and less demanding.

And even as satan confused the people of Jesus' day by having them ask for physical bread to satisfy their spiritual hunger so, too, he succeeds today in getting many people (even church folk) to substitute a physical act for a spiritual reality.

For some, it is the worthy act of taking communion. For others, it is the less worthy act of gathering honor for honor's sake, power for power's sake, or wealth for wealth's sake.

Everyone of you within the sound of my voice this morning is hungry and you will strive to satisfy the demands of that hunger. But Jesus says to you, as He said to the people of Capernaum,

“Do not spend your energies trying to get food that
will not last but, rather, accept the food that will last
on into eternal life.”

My friend, you are more than a body. You possess a spirit, too. Your body will die one day, but your spirit is immortal. So do not labor for that which will only supply the needs of your body. Instead,

strive earnestly,
work diligently,
seek fervently

for the acquisition of that which will feed your spirit and give you life eternally!

“I am the bread of life”, said Jesus. “If any man will

eat this bread, he will live forever, and the bread which I give is my body which is broken for the life of the world.”

A soldier stuck a piece of half-cooked bread on the point of his sword and, holding it over the camp fire, said to his fellow soldiers:

“The staff of life on the point of death.”

Because our blessed Lord was run through with a sword...

because His body was broken for the life of the world...

because He was put to death on the cross of Calvary...

this morning He offers you the staff of eternal life purchased at the point of his own bitter death.

That life will not be found by eating the wafers from the communion table because a physical act will never supplant a spiritual reality.

That life will only be found by making Christ an intimate personal part of your life. He must be appropriated. By faith, He must become your own.

“I am the living bread which cometh down from heaven. If any man will eat this bread, he will live forever and the bread which I give is my body which is broken for the life of the world.”

“This is my body,” said Jesus, “eat ye all of it!”