

FEASTING ON THE BREAD OF LIFE

In **John 6**, Jesus miraculously fed the 5000. As we observed in our Wednesday class, this is one of the very few events which are recorded by all four gospel writers.

This event marked a turning point in the Lord's ministry, because the false conceptions of the Messiah had to be dispelled. Jesus also had to confront the less-than-altruistic motives which some disciples had for following Him.

He does this by teaching them to seek what will provide true sustenance, spiritual life. Jesus knew the hearts of men and thus did not commit Himself to them (**John 2:24**). He demonstrated this by telling the Jews that they sought Him not because of the signs (which was the original reason they were there according to **John 6:2**), but because they ate and were filled by His power to produce physical food (**John 6:26**).

The Jews were so excited about the power of Jesus to feed them that they tried to force Him to be their king (**John 6:15**). This was based on the false idea that the Messiah was to be a physical, political, and military savior, and they expected that the Old Testament prophecies about a kingdom of universal dominion would have a physical fulfillment. The power to provide an army all the food necessary would make it a powerful army, and the power to supply a besieged city with all the food necessary would keep it strong against any attack.

Jesus caused them to either learn the spiritual nature of the kingdom or to drive away the carnal-minded. He did this by saying that He is the bread of life and that a person must eat (literally, "to thoroughly gnaw on") His flesh and drink His blood in order to have life (**John 6:51-56**). Jesus intentionally made this metaphor as repulsive and gruesome as He did in order to drive away the carnal, physically-minded person who was thinking about what Jesus could provide for his stomach.

However, a spiritually-minded person understands the spiritual lesson Jesus is teaching. He explained Himself from the beginning. Let us look at His words to these followers of Jesus.

Jesus first told them for what kind of food to work (**John 6:27**). Then He told them what kind of work to do in order to receive this spiritual food that provides everlasting life. It is to believe in Jesus, the One that God sent (**John 6:29**).

With food still on their minds, they ask Jesus for a sign, and they even hint at what kind of sign they want—food! They misuse the example of Moses providing manna (**John 6:30-31**). Basically, they were telling Jesus, "if You feed us, then we will believe in You."

Jesus explained that physical food doesn't help us long-term. Their fathers ate manna and died in the wilderness because of unbelief. Jesus is the true bread, the bread of life, which came from heaven. Jesus tells them to spiritually take this bread into their hearts—"come to Me and believe in Me" (**John 6:35**).

This is the meaning of the metaphor that Jesus uses. He is the true bread, spiritual bread that provides spiritual life. This requires us to spiritually partake of that spiritual bread by spiritual action of coming to Him and believing in Him.

Sometimes people believe that Jesus is talking about the Lord's Supper. This would miss the point of the passage. Jesus is talking about the spiritual eating of spiritual bread. He expresses it in the way He does in verses **51-58** to drive away the carnal-minded.

Jesus does tell the people that He will give His literal body as a sacrifice to make it possible for them (and us) to live spiritually (**v.51**). The way we benefit spiritually from His sacrifice of His body is by obedient faith in His sacrifice for us (**Romans 3:25**). We do not literally eat His body. He does not literally give us His body to eat.

We must believe in His sacrifice and come to Him. After all, it is His sacrifice that draws us to Him (**John 12:33-34**). When we are taught God's word and learn about His love for us, we are drawn to God (**John 6:44-45**) and believe in God's love for us (**1 John 4:16**).