**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**What Jesus Sought in His Teaching**

In the first century, when Jesus went out teaching the people, what was He seeking? What was He trying to accomplish as He taught the people? We want to answer this question on our program today, but I suggest to you that as we study this question we are going to see a Jesus that the world is not expecting.

In John 6:1-13 we read of Jesus performing a miracle. He fed a great multitude of people, thousands of people, with just five barley loaves and two small fish. Now, we know the crowd knew what had just happened. John records two reactions. Verse 14 says, *“Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’”* Notice, they don’t say, “This is truly a Prophet,” but they say, “This is truly THE PROPHET,” that is, “this is the promised Messiah we have been looking for.” In fact, their passions are running so strong that they are ready to take Him at that moment and make Him their King. Look at verse 15, *“Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.”*

The multitude here was ready to make Him king. I wander what Jesus’ disciples were thinking at this moment? We don’t know exactly what they were thinking, but maybe they were thinking, “Had the time finally come?” The crowds were huge…they were excited… they were ready to make Jesus king. “Would Jesus now become the king and run the Romans out of their land?”

The next day things continued to move forward. The crowds who had been ready to make Jesus king the previous day now came seeking Him again. You would think the disciples had to feel good about that.

But it is at this moment, when everything seems to be moving in the right direction, that Jesus does something unexpected, something that will completely change the landscape that had been laid out the previous day. What does Jesus do?

The first thing He does is rebukes the people. Look at verses 26-27, *“Jesus answered them and said, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.’”* On the surface, this may seem to be an odd way to start with this crowd, especially in light of their enthusiasm for Jesus on the previous day. But we must remember, Jesus sees more than just the crowd…He sees what is in their hearts. He knows their motives. With this crowd, He knows they were coming to Him, not for the eternal truth He offered, but for the food He had provided. His blunt rebuke was designed to challenge them to seek what is more important.

Now, we wonder how His disciples must have felt when they heard this. Perhaps they were thinking, “Be careful. These people are ready to make you king. Don’t be too hard on them. Don’t run them off.” But Jesus’ rebuke provokes an exchange with the crowd that does not go well. In verse 28 they ask what they should do that they may work the works of God. Jesus tells them, *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent,”* meaning they should believe in Him. The crowd responds by demanding a sign from Him, which is an odd request in light of the miracle they just saw the previous day. Jesus had given them sufficient signs. They cite Moses, pointing out how he had provided bread (manna) for the people in the wilderness. This may be an attempt to justify their own desire for more bread. Jesus responds by pointing them to something more important – the true bread. Look at verse 32-33, *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’”*  The people want this bread (v. 34). In response to their request for the true bread, Jesus lays the truth before them plainly in verse 35. He says to them, *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”* This is the thesis statement for the powerful sermon that follows. Jesus basically says two things to this crowd in this sermon: Number one, I am the true bread from heaven that you need in order to have true life – eternal life (vs. 48-51). And number two, if they are to have this bread and the true life it gives, they have to come to Him. But it’s not just what Jesus says that is important in this lesson, it’s the way He says it. Look at what He says, beginning with verse 51, *“‘I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.’ The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.’”* This is language that does not sit well with His audience. Look at verses 60-63, *“Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’* *When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.’”* Later in verse 66 it says, *“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.”*

You have to wonder what the twelve apostles were thinking at this moment. The day before, it appears that this crowd would help their movement take off – that Jesus was about to be made the King. But now, it was all falling apart before their eyes. The people were walking away. Jesus doesn’t go running after them pleading with them to come back. Rather He turns to the twelve and asks, *“Do you also want to go away?”* (verse 67)

But surely Jesus would have known that this would happen. The question is, why did He do it? Why preach this sermon in this way? It seems like He is intentionally driving away the crowds. I wonder if His disciples were asking the same questions… “What is He doing? He’s ruining this! He’s driving them away.” The answer is simple: Jesus was not interested in merely drawing great crowds. He was calling people to be committed to Him. He wanted them to truly believe in Him, in who He was and what He had come to do. He wanted them to follow Him. If they were going to be His disciple it would take real commitment to Him – not just the desire for bread He could give them. And so, Jesus was sifting through His followers, weeding out with His message those who really did not believe in Him, trying to get down to those who were truly committed.

It is for many an unexpected scene that leaves us with some challenging questions for us to answer.

First, Are we seeking what Jesus sought? Seems like everyone today wants to draw a big crowd. In fact, I think that’s basically how most people measure the success of a church – they look at the attendance figures. They think, those who are drawing large crowds must be doing something right. And so those who preach for these churches are encouraged to write books and speak at conferences and share their strategies that made them so successful at drawing the crowd. We are told that we need to have professional performers, childcare, and short sermons. We are told that we must be seeker-sensitive…don’t do anything that will offend or drive people away. Avoid controversial subjects that might offend someone who is visiting.

But then I read about the actions of Jesus in John 6 and I’m left wondering, are we really seeking what Jesus sought? Please don’t misunderstand. I would certainly love to see thousands (even tens of thousands) of people coming to the services of the church. Jesus would certainly want to see that! But John 6 makes clear that Jesus was not interested in just any crowd; He wanted a committed crowd. He wanted to gather people who were genuinely interested in knowing Him and following Him.

Secondly, Does our teaching do what His teaching did?

The strategy of some preachers and churches for drawing and keeping a crowd is to stick with positive preaching only. You will not hear them preach sermons that identify immoral behavior or religious error and lay out the consequences of these. In fact, they are very careful to avoid taking a firm stand on any controversial issue. The reason for this is plain; if you take a firm stand on an issue, you’re going to alienate someone in the crowd. They may not come back.

But then we look to the life of Jesus and His preaching, and He is so different. He was not at all reluctant to speak specifically about sin, take firm stands on controversial issues, and call people out for their evil conduct. When asked about divorce (Matthew 19) or paying taxes (Luke 20), He gave definitive answers. He called out the religious leaders of His day for treating their own rules as though they were the laws of God (Mark 7). He launched into that scathing rebuke of the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Matthew 23). He called this crowd out in John 6 for their shallow motives. While some loved Him, others hated him because of His teaching. His enemies were so angry they sought to kill Him.

Which leaves us with a question: if we are doing what Jesus did, preaching His message in a wicked world, shouldn’t we anticipate similar responses? Shouldn’t our preaching and teaching sometimes make people angry? Shouldn’t there be some people who leave us because they do not like what we say and where we stand on issues? I realize that we can be guilty of unnecessarily offending and we need to work hard to avoid that. But it is also true that truth will offend and drive some away. So, does our teaching do what His did?

Thirdly, we need to ask the question, would we have left Jesus? This is what happened to the crowd in John 6. They did not like what Jesus said. It offended them. So they decided to leave Him.

Put in the same position, what choice will we make? We’ve been talking about others being offended by truth, but keep in mind that there may be times when we don’t like it either. When that happens, what choice will we make? When truth demands that I stay in my marriage and make it better, rather than divorcing, what will I do? Will I forsake the Lord’s teaching or will I obey Him? When truth demands that I give up some vestige of the old man that I’ve had a hard time turning loose…drinking, ungodly influences, filthy entertainment, will I obey the Lord, or will I leave the Lord. When truth demands that I abandon some doctrine, some belief that has been part of my religious heritage my entire life, will I walk away, or will I obey?

We left off in John 6 with Jesus’ question to the twelve unanswered in verse 67, *“Do you also want to go away?”* Peter speaks for the group. He says, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* (vs. 68-69) As we face our own moments where truth demands difficult decisions in our own lives, we would do well to remember Peter’s words. There is nowhere else to go. Jesus alone is the bread of life from heaven that gives eternal life. What choice have you made about Him?

Before we close, we want to invite you to check out our web site. On this website you are able to hear sermons on a variety of topics, and you also are able to hear previous Bible Talk radio broadcasts. The web address is sjchurchofchrist.com.