

Message #22

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John

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## SATISFACTION IN THE BREAD OF LIFE

JOHN 6:22-35

I.

I was reading this week about life in Puerto Rico. The island experienced a devastating hurricane last fall. Before that the government of the commonwealth was forced into bankruptcy. The cause of that situation seems to be corruption, bloated government, mismanagement and simple overspending. One example involves the public school system. Since 2004 there has been a 45% drop in school enrollment. Many families have moved to the US. Yet there has been a 10% increase in the number of teachers and an increase in the number of administrators.

So, of course, Puerto Rico is appealing to the US government to bail them out. The US government is itself in debt. In 2008 the national debt stood at \$10 trillion. In the next eight years that soared to \$19 trillion. Many hoped that the Republicans would be more conservative and get that debt situation under control. But no, as a result of the recent budget bill, the additional deficit this year is projected to be \$804 billion. In 2008 the national debt amounted to 68% of the nation's gross domestic product. But that percentage has risen now to about 106% of GDP. Meanwhile a number of state governments, like Illinois, are also facing big deficit problems.

Do individual Americans have a better handle on debt? According to *USA Today* (1/8/2018), US credit card debt hit a new record at the end of 2017. That total debt is over \$1 trillion. I am sure that this doesn't include any of us, but probably it affects people we know. What is it about us things right now. Two, we think that things can bring us satisfaction in life.

Jesus Christ, in our passage Americans, and us humans, that puts us into these situations? I suspect that there are at least two factors involved. One is that we want to enjoy today, suggests a remedy to this situation. We are going to see what it is. We have been studying John's Gospel on Sunday mornings. We have seen that he organized his biography of the life of Jesus around seven miracles, which he calls signs. His purpose in this book, according to #20, is to show that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and to convince his readers to believe in Him so that they might have eternal life.

In #6, in the last couple of weeks, we have looked at signs four and five--- the feeding of the 5000+ and walking on the Sea of Galilee. Today we will look at the discussion that follows. Only the disciples witnessed Jesus walking on the water. But the crowd saw the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes. They want more from Jesus.

II.

Thus in vv. 22-26 of #6, which is p. 891 in the black pew Bibles, we find that THE CROWD WANTS A KING WHO WILL PROVIDE FOR THEM MATERIALLY. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE CROWD WANTS A...) According to v. 22, **"On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone."**

Last week we saw that the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes (JESUS' WALK ON WATER) happened on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. The people were fed late in the day. After Jesus had His disciples collect the leftovers, he sent them across the lake toward Capernaum. Then Jesus dismissed the crowd of Galilean Jews. Then He went up to pray on a nearby hill.

The disciples encountered a strong headwind during the night. Jesus walked across the water to help them. They were frightened by that supernatural act. Jesus immediately calmed the wind, and they quickly arrived at Capernaum.

Apparently some of the crowd stayed in the area where Jesus had spoken and multiplied the loaves. The next morning, they cannot figure out where Jesus went. He had not gone by them on the path around the lake. There was not a boat around which he could have taken.

We read then in v. 23, **"Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks."** (TIBERIAS CAPERNAUM MAP) Tiberias was on the opposite side of the lake. It was the biggest city in Galilee. It is still a major city today. It was about ten miles from the site of the miracle incident the day before.

Why the boats showed up is not stated. Some speculate that they were blown there by the wind that happened during the night. Others suggest that the occupants showed up to hear and see Jesus. Some suggest that they came to provide transportation for the people to get home.

Verse 24: **"So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus."** Why did they head to Capernaum? They saw Jesus send His disciples across the water to Capernaum the night before. (CAPERNAUM MAP) They also knew that Capernaum had become the base of operations for Jesus.

Verse 25: **"When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?'"** So the remnants of the crowd from the previous day showed up in Capernaum. Scholars guess that there were perhaps a thousand people who lived in Capernaum at this time. We know that the disciples Andrew and Peter and brothers James and John had fishing operations based here. (CAPERNAUM SITE)

This is what the place looks like today. The white building in the center is the partially reconstructed remains of the Capernaum synagogue. It dates to the third or fourth century. Below it, archaeologists have discovered the remains of an earlier synagogue, which goes back to the time of Jesus. The octagonal building closer to the lake sits over the site of an early church. Beneath that, some scholars speculate, was the house of Peter.

If you glance down to v. 59 in our chapter, you will notice that at least some part of this talk by Jesus was given in the Capernaum synagogue, which was apparently located under the later remains of that white synagogue.

The crowd arriving in the boats cannot figure out when or how Jesus got to Capernaum. They did not see Jesus walk by them on the land. There was not a boat available to take Him across the sea. The question itself gives support to the claim that a miracle happened in how Jesus got to His disciples. (PROJECTOR OFF)

According to v. 26, **"Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.'**" Jesus obviously did not have a proper publicist. For this was a perfect opportunity to promote His qualifications to lead a political movement.

They could have had a press conference and had a couple of the disciples describe the miracle that they had witnessed the night before.

But Jesus does not directly answer their question. He has a different agenda. He is promoting a different kind of kingdom. This crowd has a wrong motivation and a wrong interest. They witnessed the multiplication of the loaves miracle. Some of them have probably been witnesses to other miracles performed by Jesus. But they have missed the signs. They have missed the significance of these miracles. The apostle John has recorded these signs so that his readers may recognize that Jesus is the Christ--- the Messiah--- and the Son of God.

The people in this crowd have a limited interest. They are interested in the food. They want to have their physical needs met. They want more free food. Roman politicians who were seeking higher office would give out free food to win popular support. The Galilean Jews were looking for something like that. They were not looking for a spiritual Savior, for one to save them from their sins. They wanted a king. They wanted a revolutionary leader who would kick out the Romans and make Israel great again. They wanted a Moses who would provide food from heaven on a regular basis.

That is the general kind of thing that people are still looking for today. They want a leader who will bring economic prosperity. Bill Clinton famously said, "It's the economy, stupid." That is much of the appeal of Donald Trump. He is a businessman who knows how to get things done and knows how to get the economy humming again.

Even in the Christian community, the so called prosperity gospel, or health and wealth gospel, has a certain appeal. A significant number of TV preachers proclaim that if people just have enough faith, or follow the right formula, they are certain to experience better health and economic prosperity. According to *The Atlantic* magazine (12/2009), 50 of the 260 largest churches in America promote a prosperity theology. The concern there is not so much for salvation from sin and investing in a spiritual kingdom. It is about physical health and material prosperity and personal fulfillment.

Unfortunately the bad theology has acquired a large following in the southern half of Africa. A good pastor in Lusaka, Zambia, says this: **"We need to address prosperity theology here in Africa because it has replaced the true gospel of salvation with a kind of 'gospel' that is no gospel at all. This is happening in what once were mainstream evangelical circles. Everywhere, especially on radio and television, almost all you hear is this message about how God in Christ wants us to be physically healthy and materially prosperous. You hardly ever hear sermons about sin and repentance. So**

salvation has now become deliverance from sickness and poverty. It is temporal rather than eternal. Prosperity theology is like the Arabian camel that gave the impression it simply wanted a little space in the tent, but now the whole of it is inside and the true gospel is outside. This erroneous teaching is filling churches across the continent with people who have no desire for true biblical salvation or godliness. Sadly, it's spreading like an uncontrollable bushfire." (The Gospel Coalition, 6/25/2015) Such is the crowd that wants a king to provide for them materially.

III.

In vv. 27 & 28 JESUS SAYS THAT PEOPLE DO BETTER TO FOCUS ON ETERNAL PRIORITIES. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. JESUS SAYS THAT PEOPLE...) Jesus says in v. 27, **"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."**

Much of the time and energy of most people in ancient times was spent on acquiring the basics of life--- of getting food and shelter. For some today that continues to be a challenge. This was a primary motivation of this crowd that surrounded Jesus. They were hoping that Jesus was a new Moses who could provide them with bread and fish, who could perhaps help their political situation. But Jesus says that their biggest concern should be with eternal things, with eternal food.

Jesus said a similar thing to the Samaritan woman at the well back in #4. Turn back a page or two in your Bible, and look in #4, beginning in v. 13. **"Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"** Jesus is promoting a concern for eternal priorities.

Lest Jesus be misconstrued as saying that this eternal life must actually be worked for, He says in v. 27 of our passage that the Son of Man will give this eternal life. It is a gift. (EPHEISANS 2:8-9) The Apostle Paul stressed this in Ephesians #2 vv. 8 & 9: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."**

The Son of God is the key in this. Faith in Him is the responsibility that we have. It is work only in the sense of giving attention to eternal priorities. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 27 speaks of a seal that God the Father has set on Jesus. In Ephesians #1 the Holy Spirit is described as a seal in the life of the followers of Jesus. Here Jesus says that the Father has placed a seal on Him. It is a mark of authority and ownership.

The background of this was an earlier version of the signatures that we are often required to place on legal and financial documents. (PROJECTOR ON--- SEAL) Typically wax or clay was placed upon a document or an important object or a pouch. Then the impression of the owner's ring was placed on the wax or clay. The unique mark that was left signified the owner or official who was behind that mark. It conveyed the authority and power of that person. It was something like our modern signature.

The nature of the seal that the Father has placed on Jesus is not exactly clear. It may include the voice from heaven that people heard when Jesus was baptized. It may include the miracles that have been performed at the hands of Jesus.

Verse 28: "**Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?'**" At least there is some kind of concern here about eternal things. There is some kind of interest in pleasing God. But they are still not on the right track. The people in the crowd want to do something. They want to earn God's approval. Such is the nature of all human religions. The Jews connect pleasing God with observance of God's Old Testament Law.

Still the primary concern of these Galilean Jews was their political and economic situation. They had hopes that Jesus might meet their agenda. Jesus said that it is much better to take a longer view. It is important to think about eternity. Life is so short. In the long run we humans need to have eternal priorities.

Most of us here are truly Christians. We are headed for heaven. But we need to continually be reminded about the importance of having an eternal perspective. What is it that we are doing that will count for eternity? What kind of legacy will I leave? Am I using my time and energy and money and personal relationships in a way that will make some kind of eternal difference?

IV.

In vv. 29-35 we find that TRUSTING IN JESUS IS THE BEST ETERNAL PRIORITY. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. TRUSTING IN JESUS IS...) Look at v. 29: "**Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe**

**in him whom he has sent."** The only work that is required for the receiving of the gift of eternal life is belief. In Romans #3 v. 28 (ROMANS 3:28) the Apostle Paul explained, **"For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."** The original Greek word for "justified" is a legal term. It means "to be declared righteous." We receive this declaration of righteousness from the Eternal Judge simply by trusting in Jesus, who paid the penalty for our sin.

In what sense could "belief" be described as a "work?" (JOHN CALVIN QUOTE) The famous reformer John Calvin explained, **"It is, therefore... a passive work, to which no reward can be paid, and it bestows on man no other righteousness than that which he receives from Christ."** (Calvin, *Gospel of John*, Vol. 1, 6:29) This is sufficient to satisfy a holy God.

The crowd which Jesus was addressing did not have this kind of faith. They were looking at Jesus as a potential political leader, perhaps a king, perhaps a prophet like Moses. They did not realize that this was God in the flesh. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So it is that we read in the next verse, v. 30, **"So they said to him, 'Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?'"** This is rather remarkable. Most of these people had witnessed a supernatural provision of food performed at the hands of Jesus on the previous day. In #4 one of John's seven signs was described which involved the healing of a royal official's son. That official and that son were from Capernaum. In the other gospels we are told that the twelve disciples had recently been sent out with the authority to heal people and exorcise demons. At one crowded meeting at Peter's house in Capernaum, a hole in the roof was dug, and a lame man was dropped down from the ceiling. Jesus healed him on the spot. Yet these Galileans want more signs?

Part of their request may relate to a Jewish tradition. There are a couple of Jewish documents that reflect the thinking of religious teachers in the time of Jesus. One of them is called 2 Baruch. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 BARUCH 29:8) At one point in this document the author is talking about a coming Jewish Messiah. He writes, **"The treasury of manna will again descend from on high, and they shall eat of it in those years."** In an early Jewish commentary on Exodus 16 v. 4 (Midrash Rabbah, Eccles. 1:9), the author says, **"As the first redeemer caused manna to descend... so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend."** Perhaps these Galilean Jews were expecting the Messiah to provide manna from heaven on a daily basis, as was the case in the time of Moses.

(PROJECTOR OFF) In v. 31 the people continue with their request: **"Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"** This statement may support the

idea that these religious writings outside of the Bible reflected their thinking. They expected a daily renewal of the manna miracle.

Most students of the Bible suspect that the quotation that is cited by the crowd is a loose translation of Psalm 78 v. 24. (PROJECTOR ON--- PSALM 78:24) That verse says, "**...and he rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven.**" So the feeding of the 5000+ was good. But they expected more. Perhaps they were wanting this each day.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Verse 32: "**Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.'**" Over a hundred years ago archaeologists discovered a lintel, the top of a door frame, from the ruins of the synagogue at Capernaum. Engraved in the middle of the lintel was a pot of manna. The lintel may have come from the later synagogue in Capernaum. But it may also have been the picture on the door of the earlier synagogue. As Jesus was speaking the words of v. 32, it could be that he was pointing to that engraving on the door frame.

The main issue that Jesus is addressing in this verse is the misconception of the Jewish Galileans that it was Moses who was responsible for the manna from heaven. It was God who was responsible for that miracle. Jesus also adds that it is God the Father who provides true bread from heaven. Thus Jesus implies that He is speaking about more than just physical bread.

Verse 33: "**For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**" The manna in the time of Moses was good only for one day at a time. The bread that Jesus miraculously provided was only a temporary blessing. Jesus is talking about a bread that gives--- present tense--- life. It is a lasting nourishment. It is also not just for Israel, but it is for the whole world.

These people just don't understand. According to v. 34, "**They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'**" Their comprehension is no better than the Samaritan woman at the well. In #4 Jesus told her that he had water that would cause her to never thirst again. Jesus makes a similar kind of offer here. They also seem to understand Jesus only on a literal level.

Jesus is a little more direct in v. 35: "**Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'**" This is an offer of spiritual life, of



eternal life. It is an invitation to salvation. It is a call to come to Jesus. It necessitates an awareness of spiritual hunger, not just physical hunger. It requires an admission of need before a holy God.

This is also the first of seven "I am" statements that we will find in John's Gospel. Each one expresses Jesus' relationship to humanity's basic spiritual need in symbolic language. Jesus goes on to explore the bread illustration in the remainder of this chapter.

Suffice it to say here that Jesus is stressing the point that we humans have to recognize that our deepest needs are not material and physical. They are spiritual. We need to take the long view. Jesus wants His audience to have an eternal perspective. The best perspective on eternity has trust in Jesus as its foundation.

William Borden (PROJECTOR ON--- WILLIAM BORDEN) had access to all of the material benefits that life has to offer. He was heir to a fortune. When he graduated from high school in 1904, his parents gave him a trip around the world. William Borden was already a Christian. So as he traveled through the world, he felt compassion for all of the hurting people that he encountered. In the back of his Bible he wrote, "No reserves." He determined that he would be a missionary.

First, he went to Yale University. Unfortunately, Yale had already strayed from its Christian origins. Surveying the faculty and student body, Borden quickly realized that he was confronting an institution that was dedicated to secular pursuits. During his first semester, a friend described what happened, "**It was well on in the first term when Bill and I began to pray together in the morning before breakfast. ... We had been meeting only a short time when a third student joined us and soon a fourth. The time was spent in prayer after a brief reading of Scripture. ... [Bill] would read to us from the Bible, show us something that God had promised and then proceed to claim the promise with assurance.**"

By the end of that first year, 150 freshmen were meeting weekly for Bible study and prayer. By the time that Bill Borden graduated, 1000 of the 1300 students on campus were meeting in such groups. Bill also sought to help needy people outside of Yale. He rescued drunks from the streets of New Haven. He founded the Yale Hope Mission. One of Bill's friends wrote that he "**might often be found in the lower parts of the city at night, on the street, in a cheap lodging house or some restaurant to which he had taken a poor hungry fellow to feed him, seeking to lead men to Christ.**"

Bill Borden was rich and popular and smart. He served as president of Phi Beta Kappa in his senior year. He had great job offers when he graduated, but he was determined to become a missionary. He also wrote two more words in his Bible: "No retreats." No reserves and no retreats.

Bill went on to Princeton Seminary in New Jersey to get additional theological and Biblical training. He decided that he wanted to reach Muslims in China. So after this graduation, he went to Egypt to study Arabic. While he was there, he came down with spinal meningitis. Within a month, he was dead at age 25. Just before he died, he also wrote in his Bible, "No regrets."

Most American newspapers carried the story of his death. Biographer Mrs. Howard Taylor wrote in her book about him, "**A wave of sorrow went round the world... Borden not only gave (away) his wealth, but himself, in a way so joyous and natural that it (seemed) a privilege rather than a sacrifice.**"  
*(Borden of Yale '09)*

No reserves. No retreats. No regrets. Such is the life of one who focuses on eternal priorities and has a foundation based on trust in Jesus.