

Message #24

Kurt Hedlund

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JESUS AND THE NATURE OF OUR SALVATION

JOHN 6:41-51

I.

Since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His followers have sought to bring the story about Him to people throughout the world. They have rightly tried to do that in the most effective ways possible. The problem is that sometimes the message has been distorted in the process.

A classic example of that in somewhat recent days is the message of Robert Schuller and his church, the Crystal Cathedral. (PROJECTOR ON--- ROBERT SCHULLER) This guy was successful in building a megachurch in southern California. Many have regarded him as an evangelical Christian. Yet, in his effort to bring many to Jesus, and to his church, the message of the Biblical gospel has been distorted.

In the 1980s he wrote a book entitled *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation*. Robert Schuller (1ST SCHULLER QUOTATION) writes, **“As we focus on Jesus Christ, we shall discover a new theology, one that offers salvation from shame to self-esteem.”**(p. 58) A proper view of self is a byproduct of faith in Christ. Some who struggle with self-esteem need a better view of themselves. They need to recognize that they have infinite worth because they are created in the image of God. But is self-esteem the focus of Biblical salvation?

(2ND QUOTATION) He also writes that in order to proclaim the gospel, Christians must **“tell people everywhere that God wants us to feel good about ourselves.”** (p. 68) How does that differ from the message of secular humanism? Is this message really the heart of the gospel? An essential part of the gospel message is the recognition that we are sinners separated from a holy God. Our feelings are not the primary concern of the gospel.

(3RD QUOTATION) Schuller also says that to be born again is to **“be changed from a negative to a positive self-image--- from inferiority to self-esteem, from fear to love, from doubt to trust.”** (p. 39-40) We have seen in #3 of John’s Gospel that Jesus first used this term “born again” in a conversation with

the religious leader Nicodemus. He was explaining to him that it was necessary to be born again in order to be a part of the kingdom of God. Nicodemus and his fellow members of the high council of Judaism seemed to have a high view of themselves. They needed to lose some self-esteem, to be humbled, in order to recognize their desperate need for Jesus. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Others of us preacher types have not gone to this same extreme. But some of us have focused mostly on the benefits that come from Christian faith, how it will help our family life and work life and personal relationships, all of which may be true. Some of us have offered incentives in order to get people to our church services. Perhaps we have overlooked the methodology that Jesus used in presenting His message. Perhaps we all have something to learn in how he approached the people around Him and how He dealt with skeptics. Such is the value that we may find in the passage before us this morning.

We have seen that the Apostle John has organized the biographical material of Jesus around seven miracles, which he calls signs. Signs four and five involved the feeding of the 5000 plus women and children, and walking on water. These miracles occurred in Galilee (CAPERNAUM MAP 2), in what we know today as the northern part of Israel. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a bit to the west of the Sea of Galilee. He made Capernaum his base of operations once He began His public ministry.

The feeding of the 5000+ happened (CAPERNAUM MAP) on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. On the next day in Capernaum, Jesus engaged in a discussion with some of these same people. He uttered the first of seven "I am" statements. He declared, "I am the bread of life." The crowd wants Jesus to meet their agenda, which includes providing daily bread from heaven and leading them in kicking out the Romans. Jesus has a different agenda, and the crowd is not buying it

II.

So in vv. 41 and 42 of #6 in John, which is p. 892 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, SKEPTICS CLAIM THAT JESUS IS JUST A MAN. (II. SKEPTICS CLAIM THAT...) According to v. 41, **"So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'"**

The miracle of multiplying the loaves and the fish brought natural comparisons with Moses, who was present for the provision of manna from heaven, when the Israelites fled from Egypt centuries earlier. Moses predicted that there would be someone like him who would come later, to whom they needed to listen. The Galilean Jews are wondering if this is the guy. But He has a different agenda than the Galilean Jews do. He is talking about a spiritual kingdom. Now He is claiming that He is bread from heaven.

Several times in this chapter Jesus claims to have come down from heaven. Most of the crowd is not buying it. The author calls the skeptics “the Jews.” Most of the time in John’s Gospel that term is used to refer to the religious leaders in Jerusalem who oppose Jesus. Here it seems to refer to the leaders of the skeptical crowd at Capernaum. Apparently they are Galilean Jews. For in the next verse they claim to know the family of Jesus.

Their grumbling is characteristic of the behavior of their ancestors toward Moses in the wilderness. When they initially entered that wilderness, they immediately became aware of the lack of food that they had. (EXODUS 16:2) In Exodus 16 v. 2 we read, **“And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness...”** After they received the miraculous provision of daily manna, they grumbled that they were tired of it. They wanted meat. The grumbling continued.

What is the problem now? (PROJECTOR OFF) Verse 42: **“They said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”** Their basic point is that Jesus is just a man. He is one of us. The skeptics claim to know His parents. Once Jesus begins His public ministry, Joseph is never mentioned as being around. Mary and the siblings of Jesus are mentioned. So it would appear that Joseph died sometime earlier, perhaps not long before this.

James and John were cousins of Jesus. They had their family fishing business in Capernaum. Some of the people in Capernaum may have known the family of Jesus from visits to their relatives in that town. Then also in #2 there is an indication that the rest of the family of Jesus moved to Capernaum after the miracle of turning water into wine in Cana. (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 2:12) According to v. 12 of #2, **“After this he [Jesus] went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.”** The reference to the temporary stay may be because the Passover followed shortly after this, and everyone went to Jerusalem to observe the feast. Notice also that Joseph is not mentioned.

Obviously the skeptics did not know the whole story about the circumstances of the birth of Jesus. (PROJECTOR OFF) Probably Joseph and Mary did not advertise it. They realized that most would find it hard to believe. It is also interesting that Jesus here does not choose to explain the circumstances of His birth.

There is a further irony in that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in fulfillment of the prophecy in the Old Testament book of Micah. Does anyone know what the literal meaning of “Bethlehem” is? “Beth” is “house.” “Lehem” is “bread.” Jesus is the bread from heaven who came down to be born in “the house of bread.”

The issue for many skeptics today is likewise that Jesus was just a man. It is clear from historical records that He existed. But is he just a man? It would be difficult to prove that He had a birth from a virgin. The claim to have risen from the dead, however, is an issue that is more easily subject to historical verification. If Jesus was just a man, where is His body? No one could ever come up with His body. It is not as if the Christian claim about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is an idea that people came up with decades after His death. The claim was made right away. The apostles who knew Him immediately claimed that He had risen from the dead. The early charge from Jewish leaders was that the disciples had hidden His body. All but one of the eleven remaining apostles of Jesus died the death of martyrs, staking their claim on the truth of the resurrection. Why would people put up with the abuse that they did and die for something that they knew was not true? There is good historical evidence that Jesus was more than just a man.

III.

In vv. 43-45 we find that JESUS CLAIMS THAT INDIVIDUAL SALVATION IS THE RESULT OF THE FATHER'S DRAWING. (PROJECTOR ON--- JESUS CLAIMS THAT INDIVIDUAL...) Verse 43 reads, **“Jesus answered them, ‘Do not grumble among yourselves.’”** The grumbling is done in regard to Jesus’ claim that He is from heaven. Jesus does not say that they are misunderstanding His claim to be from heaven. That is clearly the claim. The audience is just not buying it.

Verse 44: **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”** This is a fascinating response. Modern Christian strategists would have suggested a more effective tactic. Provide more evidence that You really are from heaven. Explain the virgin birth. Do another miracle for these people. Soften them up with some Christian music.

Jesus not only does not do any of these things. He brings up the subject of election and predestination. Election and predestination? A lot of preachers avoid this subject with their own Christian congregations. Bring this up with skeptical unbelievers?

But this is what Jesus does. This is the real issue. Jesus has provided an abundance of evidence that He is the real deal, that He is the Messiah. He just did an incredible miracle the previous day. He has done many miraculous healings, even right there in Capernaum. He has raised someone from the dead in nearby Nain. He has fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. The reality is that these people cannot believe unless God the Father draws them.

The Apostle Paul described the reality of the human condition in Romans #3. In nine verses the apostle lists several passages from the Psalms that describe human inability. (ROMANS 3:10-11) Here are just the first two verses: **“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”**

If this is the case, how is it that some do find the God who is really there? The words of Jesus in our verse in John provide the explanation. It is God the Father who draws them. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The original Greek verb, translated here in v. 44 as “draws,” appears five times in John’s Gospel, once in Acts and once in James. In each situation the drawing takes place in a situation of tension. There are forces at work which oppose the drawing. Yet, as Greek scholar Leon Morris notes, there is not one example in the New Testament of the use of this verb where the resistance is successful. The drawing cannot be stopped, especially when God the Father is the One who is doing the drawing. This is confirmed in the second part of the verse, where we are assured that those who are drawn will be raised up on the last day. The reference is to the resurrection of believers.

The motivation behind this drawing is only love. We find examples of this winsome love of God in the Old Testament. Jeremiah #31 describes the future establishment of the Messianic kingdom. The prophet speaks of God’s restoration of the nation of Israel. (PROJECTOR ON--- JEREMIAH 31:3) In v. 31 of #31 he writes, **“The Lord appeared to him [Israel] from afar, saying, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness’”** It is an irresistible love.

In his book *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis describes his encounter with this irresistible love of God. (PROJECTOR OFF) He writes, **“You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalene [College] night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted for even a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In ... 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The prodigal son at last walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will**

**open the high gate to a prodigal son who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape. The words *compelle intrare*, compel them to come in, have been so abused by the wicked men that we shudder at them; but, properly understood, they plumb the depth of the Divine mercy. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation.”**

J. C. Ryle was an evangelical Church of England bishop from over a century ago. He says this about v. 44: **“...man likes to think that his salvation is in his own power. Such notions are flatly contradictory to the text before us. The words of our Lord here are clear and unmistakable and cannot be explained away.... Man never of himself begins with God. God must first begin with man.”** Such is the effective grace of God. By means of the Holy Spirit, God draws us to Jesus.

Jesus adds in v. 45 of our passage, **“It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught of God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me...”** The reference seems primarily to be to Isaiah 54 v. 13. But Jeremiah #31 v. 34 says something very similar. Both passages speak about the coming of the Messianic kingdom. The original citizens will all be true believers. This kingdom will have Jesus as its king. Its citizens will all have heard and responded to God the Father. What Jesus is saying to the Galilean Jews is consistent with this. All who have heard the Father come to Jesus. It is the sovereign work of God.

Eternal salvation finds its origin in God. We who are followers of Jesus are not wiser or more deserving than unbelievers. There is no room for pride. Salvation is a gift. It is God the Father who opens our ears to receive it. The desired response from us is praise and thanksgiving and obedience and service.

IV.

In vv. 46-47 JESUS CLAIMS THAT BELIEF IN HIM PRODUCES ETERNAL LIFE. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. JESUS CLAIMS THAT BELIEF...) Verse 46: **“...not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.”** In Chapter 1 the Apostle John declared that no one had seen God. There were a few Old Testament saints who saw manifestations of God. Abraham met with God in a tent in the wilderness. He saw some kind of shining manifestation of God. Moses on Mt. Sinai met with God. Elijah in the midst of a depression had an encounter with God. The prophet Isaiah had a vision of God in heaven. All of these were limited manifestations. Some, or all, of them may have been visions of God the Son.

Jesus claims that He is from heaven. He has knowledge of the Father from eternity past. Truly He has seen Him. Later, Jesus will tell His disciples that if they have seen Jesus, they have seen the Father. Jesus is the best possible representation of the Heavenly Father.

In vv. 44 & 45 Jesus says that those who are called of the Father have heard Him. Only Jesus Christ has truly seen Him. Jesus is the key. He is the Mediator between human beings and God. The Galilean Jews do not realize it yet, but the death of Jesus is the basis for their possible reconciliation with God.

In v. 47 Jesus adds, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.”** Even before the death and resurrection of Jesus, eternal life was available. It was based on the future death of Jesus for the sins of the world. The key responsibility was, and is, to believe in Him.

Here is the divine tension and mystery. Only those who are drawn to Jesus can come to Him. But if anyone will believe in Him, he or she can be certain to be part of that group. God is sovereign in salvation. We are responsible to believe. If we believe, we can know that we are part of those drawn by the Father.

I suspect that these words of Jesus were formative in the thinking of the Apostle John. In his first epistle John would later write these words: (1 JOHN 5:11-12) **“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 JOHN 5:13) I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.”** We can know that we have eternal life now--- not on the basis of any good in us, but simply on the basis of trust in Jesus.

V.

In vv. 48-51 JESUS CLAIMS THAT HIS DEATH IS THE BASIS FOR ETERNAL LIFE. (V. JESUS CLAIMS THAT HIS...) Again in v. 48 Jesus declared, **“I am the bread of life.”** He said the same thing in v. 35. This is the first of seven “I am” statements that Jesus will make in the Gospel of John.

Jesus adds in v. 49, **“Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.”** The thousands and thousands of Hebrews who fled their slavery in Egypt did not have enough food to live on in the Sinai wilderness. God miraculously provided manna each day, except for the Sabbath. This manna was a

bread-like thing. But it was not quite like anything the Hebrews had ever seen. The word “manna” literally means “What is it?”

This manna was to prove to be a type, a symbolic picture that would find its fulfillment in Jesus. For Jesus would also be a unique individual who would come from heaven. The Hebrews have difficulty in understanding what, or who, He is.

It is clear that manna kept the ancestors of the Galilean Jews alive. But the food was only of temporary value. It had to be provided every day. In the end, all of these people died. Jesus is claiming to offer something of much greater value.

In v. 50 He says, **“This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.”** It would appear that Jesus is speaking about spiritual life, rather than physical life. It is important to also notice that the Greek verb here is not in the present tense, which would stress the need for a continual eating. It is in the aorist tense, which more easily lends itself to an interpretation that a one time eating is in view.

In v. 51 Jesus adds, **“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”** The first two sentences summarize what Jesus has already said. The first part of the third sentence says that Jesus is for more than just the Jews. His bread is for the whole world. It has potential benefit not just for Jews, but also for Gentiles.

Then Jesus further identifies the bread as being his flesh. Some in the history of the church have tried to make the case that Jesus Christ and the Apostle John are describing the Lord’s Supper. The Catholic Church came to say that by participating in the mass, Christians are receiving the body and blood of Jesus.

There is an important distinction to be recognized here in the words that Jesus chooses. Elsewhere in the Gospel accounts and in 1 Corinthians #11 where the institution of the Lord’s Supper is described, reference is made to the body of Christ, never to His flesh. “Flesh” is the word which is used here, not “body.” The point is that Jesus is talking about the sacrifice of His life on the cross, not the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. It is His death on the cross that will provide the sacrifice necessary to pay the penalty for the sins of the world.



In 1 Peter #2 v. 24 (1 PETER 2:24) the apostle wrote, **“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”** The reference is to the spiritual healing provided by the death of Christ on the cross. It is this death which is the basis for eternal life.

In the aftermath of World War II, there were thousands of children and teenagers who were left without family. The United Nations was involved in organizing them into displaced persons camps. One of the first of these camps that was established was an orphanage that was called Kloster Indersdorf. The former monastery was quickly populated with a couple of hundred orphans who came from a variety of backgrounds. Most of them had horrible experiences. Most of them had struggled to have enough food to eat. The workers at this place found that the children wanted to eat all of the time. Some of them desperately wanted to take bread to bed with them at night. It gave them confidence that they would have food to eat the next morning. The workers found that it was important to allow them to take bread to bed with them. (Smithsonian Online, 3/14/2017)

Jesus is the bread of life whom we desperately need. It is good to keep this bread with us all of the time. For He is the source of our spiritual life. It is trust in Him that gives us eternal life.