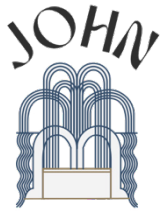


An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“THE WORK OF GOD”

John 6:22-29

Theme: Salvation is a gift from God through Jesus Christ to everyone who trusts in Him.

Introduction: Have you ever unwrapped a gift and thought, “I’ve earned this and deserve it!” Or did you immediately reach for your wallet, as if you needed to pay for it? That’s exactly what happens when people try to “earn” salvation. They take what God freely gives and treat it like a transaction. But salvation is not something one can earn—it’s a gift. And the moment we try to earn it or buy it, we’ve misunderstood both the Giver and the gift.

Everyone searches for something to fulfill the deepest longings of the soul. For some, it’s success; for others, it’s security, relationships, or comfort. The crowd that followed Jesus in John 6 believed they had found the answer when He miraculously fed over 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. They thought they had discovered what would make their lives better, provide security, and improve their quality of life. But the next day, they weren’t seeking Him because they understood who He was—they were after another free meal. They wanted temporary bread, but Jesus came to give eternal life.

In this passage, Jesus exposes the danger of following Him for superficial reasons. He shifts the crowd’s focus from temporary food to the eternal life only He can provide. He challenges their dependence on themselves and points them to the one true “work” that matters: believing in the One whom God has sent.

Salvation is not earned by human effort, nor is it a reward for the religiously ambitious. ***It is a gift from God, freely given through Jesus Christ, received by all who trust in Him.*** That is the good news of the gospel—and it is the truth Jesus presses into the hearts of His hearers here.

[Read Text] From this text, we see three realities that guard us from shallow faith and direct us to saving faith in Christ:

1. **The Problem of Shallow Devotion** (vv. 22–25) – The crowd sought Jesus for what He could do for them, to make their lives better, not for who He was.
2. **The Provision of Sovereign Deliverance** (v. 27) – Jesus offers food that endures to eternal life, which only He can give.
3. **The Prohibition of Self-Dependence** (vv. 28–29) – Eternal life is not achieved by works but received by believing in Christ.

I. The Problem of Shallow Devotion – 6:22-26

A. The Willingness to Pursue – vv. 22-25

1. After Jesus had attempted to send away the multitude, he went up into the

mountain to be alone and pray.

2. We know that part of His prayer was on behalf of the disciples who were struggling in the storm on the Sea of Galilee.
3. Jesus went to them and delivered them at the right time and circumstance to magnify His own glory and demonstrate the awesomeness of His power.
4. However, the multitude that He had dispersed did not go home; they remained, and on the next day, they became puzzled that they couldn't find Jesus.
 - a) *They had assumed that Jesus was still on the mountain – “The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples had gone away alone.”*
 - b) *Knowing that Jesus had sent His disciples to cross over the Sea of Galilee, when “there came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks, ... they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus.”*
5. They seemed to be greatly devoted to “following” the Lord.
6. In our day, churches are attempting to get people to follow the Lord in any way they can. Many churches would be thrilled to see a crowd like this seek after Christ.
7. However, devotion for devotion's sake has no redeeming value – devotion to Christ all depends on what drives the devotion; the motivation for following Christ must be evaluated.
 - a) Many follow Christ because they believe it will bring them physical or material blessings – cp. 1 Timothy 6:5.
 - b) Some follow Christ because they want to appear good or moral in the eyes of others – Matthew 6:1.
 - c) Some follow Christ out of family pressures or tradition – Mark 7:6-8.
 - d) Some follow Christ to feel better about themselves or to assuage their guilt – 2 Corinthians 7:10.
 - e) Some follow Christ as a “deal” to avoid Hell.
 - f) Still others follow Christ to be part of a community – John 12:42-43.
8. The biblical motivation for following Christ is the persuasion granted by God's Spirit that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior from sin – Luke 19:10.

B. The Worthless Priority – v. 26

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1. Christ sees their hearts and recognizes that it was merely a temporal blessing, not a spiritual one, that they sought.
2. Many people pursue Christ because they want some physical, temporal provision – and are unwilling to allow the Master to deal with the issues of their hearts.
3. Christ responds to these people here: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.”*
4. Here, Jesus clarifies that the entire reason the 5,000 had been fed from the five loaves and two fish was to signify that Jesus was the Christ – the provision of God to “take away the sin of the world.”
5. However, instead of being interested in the Lord’s priorities for their lives, they were focused only on their own priorities.
6. One commentator states it aptly – “Instead of seeing the sign in the bread, they had seen in the sign only the bread.”¹
7. It is entirely appropriate for each of us to consider why we are here, why we are professing our faith, and why we claim to be followers of Christ; and to ask whether my greater interest in following Christ is seeking His glory or my own “improvement of status.”

II. The Provision of Sovereign Deliverance – 6:27

A. The Distinction of God’s Provision

1. Jesus, having denounced the frivolous and superficial motivation for their devotion, continues and addresses how what God prioritizes contrasts with their superficiality.
2. He calls them to recognize that there is a higher provision that God yearns to provide them – *“Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.”*
3. *“work”* [ἐργάζομαι] – describes the willingness to exert themselves, and in this case, it describes scrambling from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other in the attempt to find Jesus.
4. He points out that the kind of provision they are trying to get through their dedicated following of Him doesn’t last – he met their need for physical bread yesterday, and it’s already back!

¹ Lange quoted by Godet, p. 578.

5. He calls their attention to the contrasting nature of the food that they ought to be striving to acquire from Him – that *“food which endures to eternal life.”*
6. In this sense, *“the food that perishes”* refers to their own efforts for temporal or physical improvement while *“the food that endures to eternal life”* refers to the accomplishments of Christ as Messiah and Savior – cp. v. 35.
7. This is the same point that Jesus made to the woman at the well in Samaria concerning the water He had to offer her – cp. John 4:13-14.

B. The Distribution of God’s Provision

1. This eternal food is available only through the provision of God in His grace – *“which the Son of Man will give to you ...”*
2. Thus, it is clearly something that can be acquired only through the gift of God – cp. Romans 6:23; 2 Timothy 1:9.
3. The reason He can provide them this food is because *“for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal.”*
4. This explains the miracles – they served as signs to identify Him as the source of eternal life – the One anointed by God.
5. This is the issue of God having *“set His seal”* on Jesus – a means of identifying who He is –
 - a) *The primary emphasis on the sealing of Jesus is that it signifies identification – a “seal” is a way of identifying oneself, and God thus identified Jesus by sealing Him with the Holy Spirit – cf. Acts 10:38.*
 - b) *The second emphasis on Jesus’s sealing is that of confirming or validating Him – a process achieved through the “signs” performed by Jesus, most recently the feeding of the 5,000 – cp. v. 26.*
6. Thus, it is through Jesus that the provision of eternal life would come – the point of all of Jesus’ miracles; salvation is available by no other means or person – Acts 4:12.

III. The Prohibition of Self-Dependence – 6:28-29

A. The Inclination of the Secular Framework – v. 28

1. However, the Jews missed what Jesus was saying and began asking: *“What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”*
2. Rather than calling out to Jesus to do for them spiritually today what He had done for them physically yesterday, they rely on their own resources

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and ask how they can achieve what needs to be done on their own.

3. Because of their self-reliant, legalistic views, they believed Jesus was saying that God demanded them to perform certain works to earn eternal life, which they believed they could accomplish.
4. This is the perspective that fallen, sinful human beings possess – that we are not so bad as to have no recourse; there must be something we can do to help ourselves – cp. *Matthew 19:16-22*.
5. For example:
 - a) *The Mormons believe that grace is needed but is not sufficient – it is something that can only reach toward men so far ... that we must, through our own efforts and compliance with the teachings of Mormonism, get ourselves within reach of God's grace.*
 - b) *The Russelites who falsely claim to be Jehovah's witnesses deny grace altogether – believing that salvation is not by grace but by faith+works+loyalty to the Watchtower organization.*
 - c) *The Council of Trent, in response to the Reformation, declared that salvation is NOT based on grace alone and those who teach it are anathema (damned); instead, they believe grace is slowly infused as a person does good works, keeps the sacraments, and avoids mortal sins.*
 - d) *Arminians – believe that grace restores a person's ability to choose for himself (called prevenient grace), meaning that a person can resist grace and can lose salvation through his choices.*
6. The sinner flatters his own soul when he believes there is something he can do to entitle himself to the reward of salvation - *Romans 4:4-5*.
7. It is an insult to God to pull Him down from His glory to a role of debtor to us in light of our righteousness.

B. The Involvement of Saving Faith – v. 29

1. Instead, Jesus states that it is not the performance of some work that brings reconciliation and redemption – but simple saving faith – *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”*
2. In essence, Jesus states that what God desires is for men to be earnestly devoted to spiritual things, with an intense desire to know the grace of God in the forgiveness of sin.
3. *“On the one hand, we are so anxious to insist that salvation is by grace alone, that we are in danger of failing to uphold the sinners' responsibility to seek the Lord with all his heart. Again, in pressing the total depravity of the natural man, his deadness in trespasses and sins, we are apt to*

neglect our duty of calling on him to repent and believe the Gospel.”²

4. As the recipients of God’s grace, we are not passive – but actively involved in receiving that grace – cp. ***John 1:12-13***.
5. The Bible emphatically insists that Faith is the instrument, not the ground of justification – cp. ***Ephesians 2:8-9***.
6. So the question for you today is this, “Will you keep trying to buy what god is offering freely, or will you open your empty hands today and trust Christ alone for the gift of eternal life?”

So What?

- 1. How can I guard against following Christ for what He can give me instead of for who He is?**
- 2. Which “temporal benefit” tends to be something that tempts me to follow Christ in order to acquire or preserve?**
- 3. How does understanding salvation as a free gift from God through Christ shape the way I think about my own good works and religious efforts?**
- 4. Where in my life do I still struggle with self-dependence instead of relying fully on the finished work of Christ?**
- 5. Has there been a time in my life when God took away something I desired to draw me nearer to Him?**

Theme: Salvation is a gift from God through Jesus Christ to everyone who trusts in Him.

²Arthur Pink, *The Gospel of John*, p. 313.