

## Lesson 8

# John 6.36-66: The Crowds

*How will you respond to Jesus?*

## Introduction

As John 6 opens Jesus has traveled to the other side of the Sea of Galilee – seeking rest and refuge. A huge crowd followed because they saw His miracles. Jesus goes up on a mountain and sits down with the disciples. Verses 4-11 record an incredible miracle. Jesus fed 5000 men, plus their wives and children ... there could have been as many as 25,000 people. What an amazing display of divine power. And this is no meager, subsistence supply of food. John 6.12 records that the people had enough food to make them full. In fact, there was enough food for 12 basketfuls of leftovers.

The crowd is simply amazed.

When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, “This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Therefore, when Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself, John 6.14-15.

On the next day, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum, 6.59. The crowd has crossed the sea and after arriving demands to know when Jesus got there, 6.25. Jesus points out the real reason why they’ve come:

Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Don’t work for the food that perishes but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set his seal of approval on him,” John 6.26-27.

Previously, 6.2, they had sought Him for the miracles. Now it is the food. For most of the crowd, it is all about what they can get out of Jesus ... they are not there to receive what He brought with Him, i.e., salvation. Jesus has brought *the food that lasts for eternal life*, 6.27a.

## The “Crowd” in the Gospels

Most often, when you read the word *crowd* in the gospels, it is not used in a good sense. Mark uses the term 38 times and almost always describes them as obstructing access to Jesus. The crowd is also seen to represent many who are either ambivalent to or in opposition to Jesus. Being part of a crowd is not the same thing as being a disciple. A crowd stands and observes; a disciple commits himself to action. Enthusiasm for Jesus, and even proximity to Him is not the same as faith.... And that enthusiasm may quick turn into opposition.

Here in John, the *crowd’s* motives are clearly identified by Jesus. Most of their desire in following Jesus was purely selfish. They were driven to Jesus either for the desire to watch or be the subject of a miracle; to have their physical needs met; or out of pure entertainment. The majority had great difficulty with His teaching ... as evidenced by what is said in John 6.60:

Therefore, when many of his disciples heard this, they said, “This teaching is hard. Who can accept it?”

Going back earlier in the chapter we learn:

- 6.36: many saw but didn't believe.
- 6.41: they grumbled.

Their problem is not the deeds Jesus is working . . . it is His definitive claims. He is making it clear as to who He is and what He demands. If He was feeding them, healing their diseases, and serving *them*, they were OK. But when Jesus identifies Himself as *the bread of life*, 6.35, and points out His origin, *I came down from heaven*, 6.38, the crowd begins to grumble and some walk away. They were even more offended at Jesus' claim in 6.40:

- 6.40a: Jesus points out His connection to the Father.
- 6.40b: Jesus ties eternal salvation to Himself. One must believe *on Him* to receive eternal life.
- 6.40c: Jesus identifies His power over death.

### ***Isn't This Jesus of Nazareth?***

Verse 42 explains what was going through their minds. They knew who Jesus' earthly parents were. They knew his background. The crowd simply cannot make the connection that He is from heaven. Like so many others of their time they had a predetermined idea of who and what the Messiah would be. Jesus fit none of their earthly expectations. As Jesus continued to ramp up His claims in 6.43-51, they began to argue, 6.52. Even the disciples were offended by His teaching, 6.61.

### ***Some Turned Away***

John 6.66 is very sad. Not just a few, but many of those who had previously committed to Him *turned back and no longer accompanied Him*. Why? Simple unbelief. At the root of all unbelief is selfishness. They were so wrapped up in their selfish, self-centered desires that they could not see their great spiritual need. They had little interest in addressing what was wrong with their souls.

## **Understanding Jesus and His Role**

What Jesus does between John 6.27 and 6.59 is identify His real purpose in coming. It wasn't political or physical . . . or even for His own will. His coming was for spiritual purposes for our redemption.

John 6.27 identifies Jesus' motive for coming. He is the food that lasts for eternal life. The Father has given Him His seal of approval and Jesus has come to do the Father's will. The crowd wants to know what work they need to do to receive it. I think here they are still thinking about physical bread . . . the kind of bread that once you eat it you don't have to worry about dying again. Jesus answers:

"This is the work of God—that you believe in the one he has sent," John 6.29.

Jesus is that One. He is the one God has sent. He is the Messiah. The people then basically say, "prove it." They want to know what sign He is going to work to affirm who He is. They are asking, *how do we really know who you are?* Isn't it amazing that they have already forgotten what happened the previous day (5000 men & their families were fed miraculously). By making these demands they are really proving their unbelief. They do not see Him as God . . . they just continue to make demand after

demand. There are never enough signs, wonders, or miracles for an unbeliever. People can be presented with innumerable instances of God's existence and still not believe. If the heart is not willing to simply believe, every sign in the world will not matter.

As they make their demand, they preface it in 6.31 by point to the great spiritual leader Moses. In their mind, there was no way Jesus (or anyone for that matter) would ever come close to being as great as Moses. Their statement in this verse is a challenge. Can you do what Moses did? Jesus answers by saying that it wasn't Moses who gave them the bread ... it was God. Moses simply organized the collection of it. And Jesus wasn't interested in handing out manna ... He was bringing *the true bread from heaven*. It gives life, 6.33. It has the power to defeat death. It has an eternal purpose. To this, the crowd presents Jesus with *another* demand:

Then they said, "Sir, give us this bread always, 6.34."

Just give it, they say.

Jesus came, not to meet physical needs, but spiritual.

"I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again, 6.35.

Physical needs are not in view. Jesus is food for the soul ... the source of true satisfaction and peace. The question Jesus answers for them is *what kind of bread* he gives verses what kind of bread Moses gave.

## Who is Jesus?

### *His Preexistence*

As we read through John 6.32-58 intertwined in these verses are Jesus' claims about His preexistence:

...My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world, 6.32b-33.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me, 6.38.

Who does Jesus claim to be?

- I am the Messiah.
- I am God.
- I am deity.
- I am the everlasting.
- I AM.

Continue reading in the chapter and see what Jesus says about Himself and His preexistence:

- John 6.46: I am from God. I have seen God.
- John 6.48: I am the bread of life.
- John 6.51: I am the living bread that came down from heaven.
- John 6.58: the one who eats this bread will live forever.

Jesus is saying He has always existed.

### ***His Purpose***

Jesus came to do the will of the one who sent Him, 6.38. The Father sent the Son in order to draw everyone who chooses Him, 6.39-40. The Son receives them, keeps them, and raises them from death to eternal life.

### ***His Promise***

What does the bread do for us? Why is it so essential?

- 6.33: it gives life, i.e., spiritual life. *Jesus is the only source of spiritual life in our world.*
- 6.35: I am the bread of life.
- 6.40, 47: eternal life.
- 6.50: whoever eats it will not die.
- 6.51: the one who eats of it will live forever.
- 6.53: life is not in ourselves.
- 6.54: Jesus will raise us up on the last day.
- 6.58: whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

### ***What makes the Promise a Reality?***

John 6.56 makes it clear. If we abide in Him, He will abide in us.

Repeatedly, Jesus promises life. Eternal life.

We receive it by surrendering to Christ:

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me, Galatians 2.20.

For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, Romans 6.5-6.

## **Understanding Our Responsibility**

We must take in the bread feely offered by God.

### ***We must come to Jesus***

“I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. “No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again, John 6.35.

Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out, John 6.37.

There is always room for you in Christ. See Isaiah 55.1-7.

### ***We must look to Jesus***

For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, John 6.40.

The words, *sees the Son* are significant. It means to scrutinize or to study. It involves an experience. We need to come to Him looking carefully and thoughtfully and see who He is.

### ***We must believe***

“I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. “No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again...” John 6.35.

Whoever believes on Jesus will have eternal life. This is the one who will be raised up on the last day. In 6.50-58 Jesus returns to the metaphor of bread. We must take Him in. It is not just enough to come and listen and admire. It is not good enough just to know about Him. It is the believe that He is the Son of God and in Him is power over death.

### **Will we Follow the example of the 12?**

So Jesus said to the Twelve, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?” Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life, John 6.67-68.

Peter and the rest of the 12 understood that Jesus provides the ultimate satisfaction for the soul. Jesus is the only thing that will bring your soul peace.

If you want heaven, you must eat the bread of life. Will you believe?