



**Thinning Out the Herd
Jesus Teaches About Bread, He is the Bread of Life
John 6:22 – 58**

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Jesus has just demonstrated to the masses who are following Him, that He is much more than the promised Moses like prophet, He is the Messiah. He did this by feeding 5000 men as well as all the women and children who were there as well. Not just feeding them a little but feeding them till they were satisfied.

They wanted to make Him king since He fed them, so Jesus went off to spend time talking with the Father by Himself.

Then He caught up with His team 3 miles or so out in the lake by walking to them.

It is now the next day.

John 6:22–27

“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 gotten into the boat with His disciples, but that His disciples had departed alone. Other small boats came from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats and came to Capernaum, looking for Jesus. And when they found



Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You get here?” Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate some of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.”” (NASB 2020)

Jesus begins His conversation with these “followers” much the same way He began His conversation with the woman at the well. He calls them out and then lays some truth on them.

But let’s back up first to how this conversation wound up taking place in the first place.

After a full meal, the followers; those who enjoy watching Jesus perform miracles, but they still have not put two and two together yet and figured out He is the Messiah; realize that He, and all His disciples, have left them alone on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Worse than that, other boats are now arriving at the location looking for their meal ticket too and all that is there to see is one boat.

They saw His disciples head out, but they did not see Jesus take a boat and head out as well. They looked but Jesus is not there either. Where did He go? “The main point is that the crowd saw no way by which Jesus could have crossed the lake.” (Morris 1995, 316)

The followers wanted someone like Moses who they believe fed them. They also want someone to overthrow Rome and free them from all the negative things that go along with living in a Roman province. The taxes, the oppression, the mandated labor and all that goes with it.

The problem though is Jesus is no longer with them, and they have no idea how He left. They did know that His base of operations was in and around Capernaum though so those who could get on a boat did, the others began to walk around the shoreline.

Simply “looking for Jesus” does not imply that they have any commitment to Him whatsoever. They did eventually find Him though. Afterall, food is what the Romans used to pacify crowds and they were hoping Jesus would do the same so that He could boast of a large following.

Unfortunately, this is no different than what we see with some churches today. They are more interested in their social media footprint than they are in reaching the world for Christ. Church marketing is now a thing. To a degree, I am okay with that and getting the word out, but some are having difficulty drawing the line.

The group “following” Jesus would have probably already “liked” the last post made about lunch yesterday. But “liking” Jesus did not make them disciples of Jesus.

We have no idea how long it took for them to locate Him, but once they found Him, their first question is pretty telling, “when did you get here?” They were looking for a handout of more food, and His leaving them in the lurch like that was a violation of the implied standard of conduct. Jesus was not looking for followers though, He was looking for disciples.

John 6:26–27

“Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate some of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.”” (NASB 2020)



Jesus basically tells them He knows their game; they want more food. They are not looking at anything spiritually, only physically. The miracles and healings, fun to watch and heartwarming, but they had missed the real point of it all.

Jesus feeding over 5000 people with only a couple of fish and 5 loaves of bread, a true miracle pointing to Jesus being the Creator, they missed that too. They had full tummies. They wanted more food to eat, or as Jesus calls it, "food that perishes." Unlike the woman at the well, they did not progress beyond the physical need into seeing what their true need was. Yes, Jesus is indeed reprimanding them. They were not looking for Him because of the miracles, but because of the food.

What Jesus meant was that though these people had seen his miracles (especially the healing of the sick and the feeding of the "five thousand," but, in a more general way, all the wonders which he had performed), they had not understood them in their quality as signs which pointed to him as the spiritual Messiah, the Son of God. (Hendriksen and Kistemaker 1953-2001, 230)

This is a reaction to Jesus that we see even today. There are those who read through the scriptures, but do not believe.

Jesus leaves you with only two options, He is either God, or a raving lunatic. Those who conclude He is a good teacher, or a prophet have totally missed it and listened to the lies of the devil. John wrote this book to definitively prove that Jesus is God.

The followers who were looking for a political savior to overthrow Rome missed the truth. Those who were happy to have eaten missed it as well. There were a few who would get it, but most did not. "The miraculous provision of food on the other side of the lake was meant to point to the food that endures to eternal life." (Kruse 2017, 189)

In fact, Jesus tells the crowd that what they had witnessed when He fed them, was part of God's seal attesting that this is indeed the Messiah, and you need to listen to Him. A seal on a document is there to attest to the authenticity of the document. God had attested to Jesus and His miracles with His own seal, the miracles. By the time of the meal, this group had been the witnesses of several events all adding to this attestation of authenticity. Jesus is Messiah, and they missed it.

You will recall that this is the same approach which our Lord made to the woman at the well. For her it was water that she wanted; for these folk it is bread. (McGee 1991, 104)

So how do they respond to this? The woman at the well wound up believing.

Two essentials of life, water and food. Jesus is pointing out He is more essential to life than those items, He is essential to eternal life.

John 6:28–30

"Therefore they said to Him, "What are we to do, so that we may accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." So they said to Him, "What then are You doing as a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work are You performing?" (NASB 2020)

Basically, they respond by asking what do they have to do to be saved. What works do they have to do in order to accomplish the works of God?

What things must they do?

Good question, but the question asked implied that they thought there was something, works of some sort that they needed to do.



Even today, most of the planet believes that they are adequate in their own strength to work their way to heaven. A recent study conducted by George Barna at the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University reflects that here in the United States, 55% believe they can earn a place in heaven. It is this attitude that is reflected in the comments to Jesus from the crowd.

Man has always felt that if he could just work at it, he could be saved. Man feels thoroughly capable of working out his own salvation. He feels competent to do it, and he feels that God must accept his works. (McGee 1991, 104)

They did not expect to hear what Jesus said. “Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”” (John 6:29, NASB 2020)

The works they must do, just believe. It is what God has done, not what you do.

When Jesus fed them back on the hill, what did they have to do? Nothing. They sat down and exercised faith that when Jesus prayed for the food, that they would receive food. And they did.

Jesus is now telling them that has not changed. What do we have to do to be saved? Just believe and exercise faith in Jesus. That is all today too. Just believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead freeing us from the penalty of being sinners. There is no list of things to do or not do. They wanted a list, so do we. Jesus simply says, believe.

Did the crowd get it? Hardly, their follow-on question I find to be amazing.

John 6:30–31

“So they said to Him, “What then are You doing as a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work are You performing? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.’ ”” (NASB 2020)

This is amazing. They have seen miracles of healing. they witnessed Jesus perform another miracle in order to feed over 5000 of them with just 5 loaves and 2 fish. He tells them these attest to His authenticity as Messiah, and they want another sign.

They want a Messiah after their own imagination, they want the one who will feed them and remove Rome. “Their behavior testifies that they do not wish to see and believe him as they claim, for they have already seen and now simply want more free food (6:26, 36)—that is, an earthly gift from a merely earthly messiah (6:27). They seek a political messiah who will bring political liberation, not liberation from sin (cf. 8:32–36). They place the responsibility for their faith on Jesus instead of on themselves; yet while seeing could lead to believing (20:8), such signs-faith was not the ultimate expression of faith (20:29), and in their case proved unsuccessful anyway.” (Keener 2012, 678)

Jesus told them they simply needed to believe and have faith, and they said, prove that you really are God’s representative. They did not believe; they would not believe. Jesus healed; they would not believe. Jesus fed over 5000 of them at one time, they would not believe. Later, Jesus will rise from the dead and what will most of the crowd do, not believe.

They did make a suggestion though, simply feed us like Moses did, or better, and that might work. Moses fed us with manna, but it was only good for the day, you say you have bread that won’t spoil. Prove it. Oh, and here is Psalm 78:24 for you.

To be fair, they did have an expectation that had been taught them by the Rabbis in the synagogues. There was a “Jewish expectation that, when the Messiah came, he would renew the miracle of the manna.” (Morris 1995, 320)



But once again, they are placing their demands and expectations on God. I hear people place conditions on God all the time. It is nothing more than a smokescreen for unbelief because the moment that thing they wanted God to do happens, then they want something else.

Jesus continues the conversation though. The teaching that they have received is incorrect and He sets the record straight. Manna was not given by Moses.

He also does a redirect and changes the topic. He does not address the request for another physical sign from them.

John 6:32–34

“Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.”” (NASB 2020)

Here is the point, it was not Moses that gave you that manna, it was God who was revealing Himself to you through Moses. Manna was perishable bread, and it was not bread from heaven but pointed to it. And it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but God who has and always will be the source of the bread that comes from heaven and brings life.

This new manna was distinguished from the old in that it was continuous in its descent and not for a time; and again it was not confined to one people, but was for the world. (Westcott and Westcott 1908, 102)

The people were placing Moses and the sign of manna into a superior position over Jesus and what He had done. By answering them the way He does, Jesus has reversed that and placed them into an inferior position under Him.

Jesus is also doing something else in His answer, He is stressing the fact that He is God’s divine gift to humanity. He is the one who has come down from heaven. He is the Word, and he is the one who brings life. He will say that seven times between verse 33 and 58.

Of course, the people still think they are talking about physical bread, bread that will not spoil supplied by God. So, they ask for that bread.

Just like with the woman at the well, Jesus has set up the crowd as well. She asked for living water, they are going to ask for the bread of life. But they are not going to react like the woman at the well.

John 6:35–40

“Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; the one who comes to Me will not be hungry, and the one who believes in Me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have indeed seen Me, and yet you do not believe. Everything that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I certainly will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of everything that He has given Me I will lose nothing, but will raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”” (NASB 2020)

If you were a trained Jew hearing Jesus, say that He is the bread of life, you would be upset. We read this in Proverbs.

Proverbs 9:5

“Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.” (NRSVue)



...if Wisdom said, 'Eat of my bread and drink of my wine,' it indicated that the manna and the miraculous water-supply were the sequence of Israel's receiving the Law and the Commandments—for the real bread from heaven was the Law. (Edersheim 1896, 30-31)

Jesus did not say He had the bread of life, He said He is the bread of life. He is the law giver. Once again, a definitive statement, "I am the bread of life." "The Jews asked for something from Christ: He offers them Himself. The great gift, if only it were rightly perceived, was already made." (Westcott and Westcott 1908, 102)

Understood in context, Jesus is clearly and definitively saying He is God. He is the solution to spiritual hunger and thirst and truly gives life.

Also, to the Jew listening, what they have heard is that the manna God provided through Moses is not the true bread from heaven, Jesus is. The Torah that God revealed through Moses is not the true Torah either, Jesus is. The true bread of heaven, the true Torah is Jesus.

Jesus has already affirmed that. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." (Matthew 5:17-18, ESV)

Those who ate manna eventually died. Manna would turn bad after only a day. Those who followed Torah, would also die. But those who place faith in Jesus, the true bread of heaven and the true Torah, will never die. Both were only pictures pointing to the truth now standing before them in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus moves on to a hard to hear truth for those who have witnessed the miracles, they have seen Him, but they do not believe. The thing they have been asking for in terms of signs, has already been given to them, but they didn't get it.

Are they curious about Him? Yes, enough to follow Him around but not enough to become His disciple. They were physical and not spiritual in their aspirations. The enemy has blinded them. How could someone be with Jesus and see His miracles and still not believe?

God knows about Satan and his smoke and mirrors game intended to blind and deflect attention from the claims of Jesus Christ. They have not ended either but continue even today.

It is up to God who believes, He knows. Jesus makes it clear though, whoever the Father gives Him, comes to Him, and whoever comes to Him, He will never reject. Does that mean if I have not come to Christ yet that the Father hasn't given me to Him? I'm glad you asked that question, why not come to Him now and resolve the question.

We all have free will and the ability to decide, just like Adam and Eve. God knows everything and knows who will and will not ultimately come to faith, we simply do not. Jesus tried to make that point clear earlier when He talked to Nicodemus.

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life." (NASB 2020)

Everyone who believes. If you haven't believed yet, there I still hope, you can still change your mind. But if you don't believe...



What Jesus tells us here when He tells us He is the bread of heaven is how to find eternal life. First, come to Him. Secondly, believe. Jesus makes eternal life possible, but we must come to Him and believe in Him. God knows those who will do this, we don't.

Something else we learn here, God is sovereign. I would love to see everyone come to faith in Jesus Christ, but I know not all will. It is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to take the words I say, or you say when you witness to someone and then twist and turn them in someone's heart breaking down the walls.

Browbeating someone into the Kingdom seldom works.

There are those you talk to who will look at you and say, no. But the Holy Spirit will have them remember what you said. That conversation is part of the reason they come to Christ later. Our job is to tell our story and leave it with Him. He is sovereign.

Being faithful to what the Lord has asked you to do or say is the measurement, not achieving results. Results are encouraging, numbers are nice, but faithfulness is what the Lord is interested in.

Paul lays some of this out for us as he contrasts the difference between his ministry and the ministry of others taking place in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 3:5–8

"What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor." (ESV)

John 6:38–40

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of everything that He has given Me I will lose nothing, but will raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." (NASB 2020)

Jesus says the same thing, He too is simply being faithful to what the Father has tasked Him to do. Because of this faithfulness, God gives those who respond to Jesus. You and I as believers are God's love gift to Jesus.

Jesus values this gift from the Father and He tells us here that everyone the Father has given Him, He will never lose. If you have believed that Jesus died on the cross for you in order to pay for your sin and that He rose from the dead making Him Lord of your life, you are in forever.

Romans 10:9–13

"If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved. For it is by our faith that we are put right with God; it is by our confession that we are saved. The scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed." This includes everyone, because there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles; God is the same Lord of all and richly blesses all who call to him. As the scripture says, "Everyone who calls out to the Lord for help will be saved." (GNB)

If you have done this, Jesus says He will never ever lose you. We are His given to Him by the Father and His intent is laid out here.

John 14:1–3

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you.



And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you also will be." (NASB 2020)

He intends to be with us forever and to make sure that happens, He will raise us up to be with Him. He intends to come back for us.

1 Corinthians 15:51–53

"Listen to this secret truth: we shall not all die, but when the last trumpet sounds, we shall all be changed in an instant, as quickly as the blinking of an eye. For when the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised, never to die again, and we shall all be changed. For what is mortal must be changed into what is immortal; what will die must be changed into what cannot die." (GNB)

God through Christ ensures in the present the future security of all true followers. (Osborne 2018, 163)

This group of followers, while Jesus is talking to them, has had some of the local synagogue leadership sneak in. There may have also been some who were following Him around who were from the Temple in Jerusalem.

Based on what we saw in John 1 regarding the nervousness of the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem about John the Baptist, this would be entirely in character for them.

They have been listening in and now they speak up.

John 6:41–46

"So then the Jews were complaining about Him because He said, 'I am the bread that came down out of heaven.' And they were saying, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven' ?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Stop complaining among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father." (NASB 2020)

The crowd, egged on by the few Jewish leaders, don't like what they hear. So, in typical fashion they complain. They understood the comment about the bread coming down from heaven and now, they have moved onto focusing in on that. How could Jesus be the Messiah?

We saw Him grow up. We know His parents.

This is all a smokescreen for the real reason. They are not interested in repenting. However, they use what they do know about Jesus' background to attack Him. They have now changed the topic. Jesus is a nobody.

What is happening here? "We are not surprised to find that Jesus' teaching about the necessity for God's grace in salvation, which we have in John 6:35–40, is immediately followed by an outbreak of protest and resentment by certain of the leaders of Israel." (Boice 2005, 511-512)

This continues today. The world will change the topic to demean the church, the pastor, the background of the pastor or evangelist, you name it. The enemy will throw the kitchen sink at what he considers to be a problem...confronting people about their need for Christ.

Jesus respond by repeating what He has already said. But now the language is rather cutting. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:44, NASB 2020) Implying, you may not be one of those.



The Jews thought that they were all chosen by God by virtue of their old birth. Jesus makes it clear that God must draw them before they can come to God. Everyone who responds to the Father will respond to the Son. (Guzik 2013, Jn 6:41-46)

They believed they were in control and Jesus is telling them that they are not. They believed that as Jews, they already had an in and they simply gave themselves to God. The truth though, as we have already pointed out, is more mundane than that. He invites, we come. Yes, the Father does indeed know who will do so since He knows everything. The Holy Spirit calls and we decide. Do we follow, or not. Those who do respond, as per the prophets, shall be taught by God and Jesus is telling them that He is fulfilling that. "Jesus here alleges that the reason why they refuse to "come to him" (i.e., believe in him as Messiah) is that they are unwilling to learn from God." (Köstenberger 2004, 214)

Jesus follows up saying something they would agree with, no one has seen the Father. That they agree with but then He adds, except the One who is from God. Jesus is from God, which He made clear back in chapter 5 while in the Temple. As such, He is the only one who can reveal the Father to them.

John 6:47-51

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down out of heaven, so that anyone may eat from it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats from this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I will give for the life of the world also is My flesh." (NASB 2020)

Once again, Jesus restates the need to believe as a prerequisite to eternal life. Works, as He pointed out earlier, will not cut it.

Jesus points out the inferiority of manna, again and that those who ate it, died. It was not the bread of heaven. He is the bread that comes down from heaven. He is the end of the law and the commandments. He is the law giver, He is God.

Jesus simply restates what He had said earlier in verses 32-35. To eat the bread Jesus gives, a term He is using as a metaphor for believing faith in Jesus, that is the one who will live forever.

Jesus is the Word made flesh. He clearly states "I am the living bread." He also makes clear He is the one who has come down from heaven, meaning He is the one who is able to reveal God to man.

Jesus continues the bread metaphor pointing to the cross and the work He will do there when He says "the bread which I will give for the life of the world also is My Flesh"

Did those listening get it? Hardly. They start arguing with each other.

John 6:52-58

"Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, the one who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread that came down out of heaven, not as the fathers ate and died; the one who eats this bread will live forever." (NASB 2020)

As soon as Jesus breaks into their argument with His statement that they will think is Him advocating cannibalism, the argument turns to disgust and many begin to walk away. Once again, they have missed what He is really saying. We started off with the followers thinking physical bread, but Jesus was talking



spiritually and using bread as a metaphor for Himself. He has continued the use of that, and now even the Jewish leadership still are thinking, physical, not spiritual. They are missing the deeper meaning of what He is saying.

He is not saying for them to begin to eat Him and to drink His blood! What He is saying is that He is going to give His life. (McGee 1991, 111)

As a result of Him giving His life, since He has come from heaven, what He offers is not simple physical satisfaction for a day and then death at some point in the future. No, what Jesus is saying is that by His offering Himself on the cross, He will shed His blood and His physical body will be sacrificed. Salvation is accepting that sacrifice that was done on our behalf and receiving Him intimately.

There were reactions to what Jesus said. There were those who still did not get it, most of the followers would disappear. These comments effectively thinned the herd a bit.

But for those who truly heard Him, their reaction was acceptance.

Where do you fall?

Jesus says He is the bread of life and that He has offered Himself on the cross for our salvation. He has paid the penalty for our sin on the cross and has been raised from the dead. All we must do is believe. There are no works, as the followers thought, to do.

ABC's of Salvation

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.



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