

## John 6:22 – 51

<sup>6:22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. <sup>24</sup> So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. <sup>25</sup> When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you get here?’ <sup>26</sup> Jesus answered them and said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. <sup>27</sup> Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on him the Father, God, has set his seal.’ <sup>28</sup> Therefore they said to him, ‘What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?’ <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom He has sent.’ <sup>30</sup> So they said to him, ‘What then do you do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform?’ <sup>31</sup> Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.’ <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.’ <sup>34</sup> Then they said to him, ‘Lord, always give us this bread.’ <sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will not hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst. <sup>36</sup> But I said to you that you have seen me, and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> This is the will of him who sent me, that of all that He has given me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I myself will raise him up on the last day.’ <sup>41</sup> Therefore the Jews were grumbling about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down out of heaven.’ <sup>42</sup> They were saying, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven’?’ <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do not grumble among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. <sup>45</sup> 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. <sup>46</sup> Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.’

## Cultural Background

- *Jesus and the Scriptures:* Remember that in 5:31 – 47, Jesus' last claim was that the Scriptures of the Old Testament testify to him. And in 6:1 – 21, Jesus fed Israelites like God and Moses fed the Israelites manna in the wilderness, then Jesus passed over the Sea like God and Moses led Israel through the Sea.
- *The Messianic King Will Restore Israel:* The phrase, 'And they shall all be taught of God,' in John 6:45 is a quotation from Isaiah 54:13. Isaiah 40 – 66 as a whole is about God restoring Israel from exile, and Isaiah 53 – 55 in particular is about the impact of the Suffering Messiah. Below is an example:

Isaiah 55:1 'Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;  
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.  
Come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without cost.  
<sup>2</sup> Why do you spend money for what is not bread,  
And your wages for what does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,  
And delight yourself in abundance.  
<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear and come to Me.  
Listen, that you may live;  
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you

## Questions

1. Let's get the big picture first.
  - a. What does this mean for you?
  - b. Why did Jesus do the miracle of bread in 6:1 – 15, and then teach on being 'the bread of life' in 6:23 – 51?
  - c. Why does Jesus not do the miracle again?
  - d. How does someone internalize (eat) Jesus?
2. How do you feel about how this conversation goes?
3. Why does Jesus now refuse to do the miracle?
  - a. What would you have done?
  - b. Notice that this conversation is a lot like the conversation about living water with the Samaritan woman.
    - i. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life (Jn.6:27)
    - ii. Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. (Jn.4:13 – 14)
    - iii. Jesus compares himself to something our bodies totally need (water, food)
    - iv. Except that the Samaritan woman didn't need a miracle! They do, or they say they do, but...
  - c. Notice that Jesus' signs 'worked' well until ch.5 then began to not 'work' or be persuasive. It's absurd that the crowd asks, 'What sign do you do?' in 6:30. They just experienced a sign when Jesus multiplied the bread!! And enough of them wanted to make him king. That was just yesterday. Why do they need another sign???
  - d. Application: Are there ways that people ask for signs today even when they are unnecessary? What might that look like in the U.S.? In your life?
    - i. They are self-centered, asking for God to serve their whims
    - ii. They are present-oriented, not asking what God has done in the past, in history, and valuing that properly
  - e. Application: In ministry, are there ways that we keep 'feeding' people who just want snacks and not the deeper thing?
4. In what sense is Jesus like the bread of life that God gave the people of Israel in the wilderness?
  - a. God is the One who gave the manna and Jesus
  - b. Every culture has an 'indigenous carbohydrate' like bread: rice, potato, etc. This speaks to Jesus' accessibility.
  - c. But nothing else can really nourish us
    - i. What did you think would nourish you? Popularity, success, a relationship?
    - ii. Leader illustrate the nourishment of Jesus
  - d. What does it mean to 'eat' Jesus?
  - e. What is the relation between the miracle of Jesus and the person of Jesus?
    - i. Jesus did it to present a physical picture of
5. Does Jesus save only some? Is Jesus saying that he will save only some people (the Calvinist doctrine of predestination)? Jesus and the future resurrection: v.37 – 44 (the difficult verses)
  - a. The main thought here is that we are meant to internalize Jesus and experience his resurrection.
  - b. One important consideration is time sequence. Later, at his death and resurrection, Jesus says, 'When I am lifted up, I will draw *all people* to myself' (John 12:32).
    - i. Both the Gospels and Paul indicate that there was some kind of 'hardness of heart' that had set in to all people after the fall in a general sense (Mt.19:8) which seems to cause each person to hit a limit of faith and experience of God at some point in their lives.
    - ii. 'Hardness of heart' is also something that human beings do to themselves, as shown by how Pharaoh hardened his own heart in each of the first five plagues on Egypt, and also the seventh (Ex.7:14 – 9:7; 9:13 – 35). God allowed it, in order to accomplish an exodus-deliverance in history, on two occasions: with Pharaoh in the sixth, eighth, ninth, and tenth plagues, (Ex.9:8 – 12; 10:1 – 11:7; 12:29 – 30), and with the Jewish leaders at the time of Jesus (Rom.11), so that God could bring about an exodus-deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt, and of Jesus as the true Israel from bondage to fallen humanity and death and the domain of Satan.

- iii. The Jewish people during the time of Jesus' ministry, even the disciples, hit 'hardness of heart' at various points (Mk.6:52; Lk.24:16, 31; Rom.11:1 – 36). Jesus ministered to Israel while Israel was suffering from 'hardness of heart' that God used. In this case, these verses in John 6 speak of why some Jews were able to come to Jesus during his earthly ministry.
- iv. That would explain why Jesus drew some people before the cross, and then 'all people' at the cross (Jn.12:32).
- c. Another important consideration is that there is a difference between the noun types in v.37 – 44. Some are neuter, suggesting human *nature*, and others are masculine, suggesting human *persons*:

v. 37: *All that* the Father gives me will come to me, (NATURE)

v. 37: And *whoever* comes to me I will never drive away. (PERSON)

v. 39: This is the will of Him who sent Me, that *of all* that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise *it* up on the last day. (NATURE)

v. 40: For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and *believes in Him* will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day. (PERSON)

v.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. (PERSON)

There is play back and forth between the neuter and the personal. This is because everyone gets raised up on the last day by Christ. Christ is the source of life for everyone, even the wicked. If he wasn't raised up, then they would not be raised up. All come to Christ, but not all come to Christ in the same way. All belong to Christ by nature by virtue of him taking up their nature and so all will come to him in the resurrection. But some will come to him in belief, which is why 'come to me' is not synonymous with belief.

- 6. The uniqueness of Jesus and the necessity of Jesus: The Jewish crowd grumbles that Jesus makes the claim that he is the 'bread of life.' In other words, that Jesus claims to be indispensable to human life while being a particular man that grew up in their midst (6:41 – 44). Also that Jesus claims to uniquely know the Father (6:46). How do you feel about these claims?
  - a. How else could we know the eternal God unless God makes Himself known to us?
  - b. Why is Jesus' flesh necessary for the life of the world? Because his flesh is God redeeming human nature for us. Jesus is cleansing human nature, so he can eventually offer it back to us so he could cleanse us. This brings us back to the human nature problem, that there is a corruption within our human nature that each and every one of us. Only God can solve that problem through Jesus.
  - c. Why would believing in Jesus allow Jesus to heal our human nature? Because we are internalizing him by his Spirit. That's the reality behind the language of 'eating Jesus' flesh.' We are taking him into ourselves by believing what he has said about who he is.

<http://acthe.wordpress.com/2013/12/31/johns-gospel-and-classical-calvinism/>

It is the opinion of at least a few persons I know that the gospel of John undeniably contains the teaching of classical Calvinism, and these texts might oftentimes be brought up in its defense. For instance, these quoted passages might be adduced as evidence of the famous five points: the condition of mankind is such that every person is incapable of approaching Jesus (presumably in some soteriologically significant way) apart from God himself electing to bring the sinner close himself, a process which undoubtedly involves the death of Jesus Christ for these persons whom God brings; and presumably, in light of the omnipotence of God, this process cannot fail, and so God's calling and election are guaranteed to be effective, one which guarantees the cooperation of the saved sinner throughout her lifetime. Here we more or less have the five points: total depravity, unconditional election, limited election, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints.

I read the texts, and the gospel of John as a whole, rather differently. In the spirit of Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance, I would object that this way of reading the text puts a "god behind the back of Jesus," so that whatever Jesus is doing, you are not quite sure if it is a clear and straightforward demonstration of God's will. A fine example is the context of the quoted verses above: Jesus' miraculous feeding of the thousands, the call for them to labor for

the food that does not spoil, and the subsequent identification of himself with that food and trust in him with that labor all suggest that Jesus wants those persons with whom he is speaking to believe in him, to trust in him, to be saved; but the classical Calvinist reading invites the qualification that in fact this might not be his will towards the persons with whom he is speaking, especially in light of the fact that they all leave him at that point. This puts a god behind the back of Jesus: the will of the Father might not be the ostensible will of Jesus.

Rather, I take the enabling actions of the Father which Jesus here mentions to be the works and signs by which the Father testifies in favor of Jesus (John 8.18). They are not some secret, arcane works of metaphysical magic which take place behind the scenes. The people's hearts are hardened and their minds are darkened; because they do not know God, they cannot recognize him in Jesus (cf. 7.17; 8.19 and passim). The Father works to enable their hearts to believe in Jesus, to trust in him, precisely through the works that Jesus performs: healing, feeding, multiplying, etc.

But of course, as always in the Hebrew scriptures, this is a volitional manner, one which depends on the cooperation on the part of the human agent with the divine grace. It's not irresistible, nor is it automatic; it is something which requires a critical decision on the part of the human agent. And it is not ultimately the divine will that they should resist or turn away: Jesus still calls out for those who question and deny him to believe, to repent, to believe in the light as long as they have the light so they may become children of light (12.36).

On the other hand, those who do use their agency properly will find that Jesus is in fact the advent of God (7.17). Those who do not accept Jesus do so because they do not know his Father who sent him (7.28-9), but those who have God as their Father — and this implies to know the true God, really to know God's will and to understand him — will recognize Christ as the true Son of God (8.42).

In fact the gospel of John presents the matter in precisely this light: God's will towards the world as manifested in Jesus Christ is positive and salvific, born of love for the world, but the human will must itself participate with the grace given to benefit. The Word of God, "full of grace and truth" (1.14), comes into the world, but those in the darkness preferred the darkness to the light (vv. 10-1). Yet those who did receive him — note the subject of the verb is the human agent, to indicate independent agency — are made children of God (v. 12). Indeed, God's will in sending his son is the salvation of the world, not its condemnation (3.16-7), and Jesus' language here is universal and general ("the world") because God's will is universally and generally salvific. Even in the high priestly prayer, Jesus prays for the unity of believers, as much the apostles as those who would come to believe in Christ through their testimony, for the sake of the world: he prays that through their unity, "the world may believe that you have sent me" (17.22). To believe that Jesus is the Christ, anointed and sent as Son by the Father — this is effectively the condition of eternal life in John's gospel, and Jesus is praying for the unity of his followers that the world may satisfy this condition. The matter is clear enough.

Yet as always it is the part of the human agent to believe the good news told him, by which he escapes a wrath of God (which I interpret to be the cursed state of the postlapsarian world). Jesus' testimony about himself is always that he has come to do his Father's will, that his will is the salvation of all who believe in him, and his complaint against those who reject him is always that they refuse to believe (e.g., 5.39-40), placing the blame squarely on their own agency.

This is, it seems to me, the picture painted in the gospel of John: "God has given 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 5.11-2). To have the Son, to win the bread that lasts forever, to do the labor of God, is to believe in Christ whom the Father has sent (John 6.29). This is precisely the call of Jesus Christ to all humankind: to trust him, to take him at his word, or if not at his word, at least on account of the miracles he has done.

The picture is one of a two-fold agency: God towards man, awaiting man towards God. Anything beyond this, which is the bare presentation of the text, is to put a god behind the back of Jesus.