

Lesson Eight

(John 6:25-59)

Frank Pack says, "The following discourse and dialogue occur in the synagogue (vs. 59), but it is not necessary to think that it was on a sabbath. There were other meetings of the people in synagogues on other days of the week for purposes of instruction. Remember also that this was at the time of the Passover, which involved several days of special celebration" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 130).

²⁵When the people found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they said to him, "Teacher, when did you get here?"

²⁶Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles. ²⁷Do not work for food that spoils; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life. This is the food which the Son of Man will give you, because God, the Father, has put his mark of approval on him."

²⁸So they asked him, "What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?"

²⁹Jesus answered, "What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent."

³⁰They replied, "What miracle will you perform so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as the scripture says, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' "

³²"I am telling you the truth," Jesus said. "What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the real bread from heaven. ³³For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

³⁴"Sir," they asked him, "give us this bread always."

After the storm had passed and Jesus went ashore with the apostles, the crowd kept on looking for Jesus until they found him teaching "in the synagogue in Capernaum" (6:59). They are amazed at the presence of Jesus on "this side of the lake," and demand to know when he arrived (6:25).

But Jesus ignores their question and, instead, makes them look long and hard at their motives. He charges them with having their minds on their stomachs. That is, their materialistic thinking was preventing any appreciation of the *message* which Jesus' miracles were intended to convey. They thought of Jesus as their "meal ticket," rather than as their Master.

There is a danger that we today may develop a similar "loaves and fishes" mentality. Have you ever known a person who always prays for blessings but never for responsibilities? Did you ever meet someone who became a Christian solely in the belief that Jesus would then take care of his financial problems? Have you ever encountered a parent who admitted that the only reason he brought his children to church was to teach them basic moral principles? It is a sad day when people think of Jesus as a genie who will perform at the snap of their fingers.

So Jesus urges these people to open their eyes, instead of their mouths. He tells them to stop looking for a handout and to look for "the food that lasts for eternal life" (6:27). And just as Jesus provided them with a free lunch, he is also the distributor of this spiritual food. They may be sure of that because God has put his mark of approval on him (6:27), as evidenced by the miracles which he did.

In 6:28 they ask what it is that God wants them to do. Jesus replies that God the Father wants them "to believe in the one he

sent" (6:28). The crowd clearly understands that Jesus is speaking of himself, so they speak up and remove all doubt as to their lack of spiritual insight. If they had been at all perceptive, that one miracle feeding would have been proof enough. But feeding people was something that Moses had done, so it was "old hat" to them. They wanted something more spectacular, a Super Miracle (6:30-31).

But Jesus accuses them of not understanding how much greater the "bread" he offers is than that which their ancestors picked up from the ground (Exodus 16:1-36). The manna in the wilderness turned rotten after only one day, but the bread which Jesus offers will never grow stale. And the reason is that, in fact, the bread which Jesus offers is actually himself (6:33). But the people are still thinking in terms of whole wheat bread, so they ask for a steady supply of it (6:34).

³⁵"I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

³⁶Now, I told you that you have seen me but will not believe.

³⁷Everyone whom my Father gives me will come to me. I will never turn away anyone who comes to me, ³⁸because I have come down from heaven to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And it is the will of him who sent me that I should not lose any of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them all to life on the last day. ⁴⁰For what my Father wants is that all who see the Son and believe in him should have eternal life. And I will raise them to life on the last day.

⁴¹The people started grumbling about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴²So they said, "This man is Jesus son of Joseph, isn't he? We know his father and mother. How, then, does he now say he came down from heaven?"

In 6:35 Jesus makes the first of the seven great "I Am" declarations which are recorded in the gospel of John (8:12; 10:7-9; 10:11-14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1-5). Bread is regarded in most cultures as a fundamental necessity in the human diet. So Jesus infers that he is the center of our spiritual diet, that he will completely satisfy our spiritual needs. And that has been the actual experience of millions who have accepted Jesus as Lord of their lives. Each of us has discovered the exciting truth that, "I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me" (Philippians 4:13).

Yet there are those who, like those crowded around Jesus in the synagogue (6:36), refuse to open their eyes to the evidence. Add the miracles which Jesus performed to the lives which he dramatically reformed and you have a massive amount of proof that Jesus just has to be the Son of God. But a prejudiced mind will not admit that material as evidence in the courtroom of his heart. I recall that my aged grandmother, who as a youth had moved from Texas to Oklahoma in a covered wagon, just absolutely refused to accept the idea that anyone could fly to the moon. And even the direct, live TV broadcast of an American astronaut walking on the surface of the moon did not change her mind! Well, these Jews were even more hard-headed than that when it came to accepting the teachings of Jesus.

John 6:39-40 is a favorite "proof-text" of those who believe that it is impossible for a Christian to fall from grace. It is certainly God's desire that every single person be saved; but those who reject his Son will be lost. As Paul Butler says, "God foreknows who will believe and who will reject, in the sense of foreknowing what men will do. He sees all time as present. He foreknows who will be faithful and, by grace, gives the faithful to Jesus. But these verses are far from teaching any such notions as 'once in grace, always in grace.' Quite to the contrary, the emphasis here is upon Jesus' *ability* and *willingness* to save that soul, which of its own free will continues committed to Him. The emphasis is not upon an 'irresistable grace.' Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all those that abide in Him of their own volition. There definitely is the possibility of falling from relationship with God through Jesus (cf. Jn. 17:12; Acts 8:14-24; Gal. 5:4). If there is no possibility of the elect ever falling from grace, why were *all* of the epistles of the New Testament written to warn the elect from falling from grace? Such doctrines as 'irresistable salvation' and 'eternal security' are not taught in the New Testament!" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 242-43). For a detailed treatment of this subject, I highly recommend Robert Shank's *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance* (Springfield, Mo.: Westcott Publishers, 1960).

Apparently these people were more interested in arguing about the truth than they are in accepting it (6:41, 52, 61). As some of our own debates have shown, it is easy to mistake the love of a fight for the love of the truth. A magazine recently printed a cartoon in which a "Little League" baseball player, who had a black eye and numerous scrapes, walked inside his house and

said, "Mom, we lost the game but we won all the arguments!" That kind of approach is not very productive when one's salvation is at stake.

A preacher who was well-versed in the scriptures nevertheless refused to debate those who challenged him. When pressed for an explanation of his reluctance, he replied: "Well, debating with those fellows would be a lot like wrestling with a hog. You both get covered with mud, but the hog likes it." This group of Jews is content with being cantankerous.

⁴³Jesus answered, "Stop grumbling among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him to me; and I will raise him to life on the last day. ⁴⁵The prophets wrote, 'Everyone will be taught by God.' Anyone who hears the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶This does not mean that anyone has seen the Father; he who is from God is the only one who has seen the Father. ⁴⁷I am telling you the truth: he who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate mana in the desert, but they died. ⁵⁰But the bread that comes down from heaven is of such a kind that whoever eats it will not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. The bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live."

⁵²This started an angry argument among them. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.

Jesus tells this argumentative assembly to pay attention (6:43). Then he announces that God's drawing power is the gospel, the story of God's providence and love as expressed through Jesus (6:44-45). As Paul says, "By means of the so-called 'foolish' message we preach, God decided to save those who believe. Jews want miracles for proof, and Greeks look for wisdom. As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles; but for those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, this message is Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:21-24).

David Lipscomb wrote, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It is the drawing power. It draws by its manifestation of the love of God, by its revelation of the crucified Saviour. If man's will consents, and he yields to the drawing power, he comes; but, if he will not, and refuses to be drawn, he does not come. God will not force him." For a detailed treatment of this subject, I highly recommend Robert Shank's *Elect in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Election* (Springfield, Mo.: Westcott Publishers, 1970).

Every person who has been born again has "eternal life" here and now (6:47). Intimate fellowship with God is not like a life insurance policy which requires you to die in order to collect. It can be enjoyed while we are still in the world.

But where does eternal life come from? Jesus provides the answer when he prays to God the Father and says, "Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son, so that the Son may give glory to you. For you gave him authority over all mankind, so that he might give eternal life to all those you gave him. And eternal life means to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, whom you sent" (17:1-3).

In 6:47-51 Jesus returns to his metaphor about the bread of life. He reminds his audience that every male, except two, died during the wilderness wanderings — so there was nothing about the manna they ate which provided greater longevity.

Today there are those who, like this immediate audience, try to interpret 6:51 with a wooden literalness which misses Jesus' point entirely (6:52). This passage may, in fact, have no reference whatsoever to the Lord's Supper, since he never uses the word "flesh" (*sarx*) in reference to the Lord's Supper. Jesus always speaks of eating his "body" (*soma*). But there are those who use this verse to try to justify the false doctrine of transubstantiation, the idea that when the Lord's Supper is blessed the "substance" or invisible quality of the bread and wine actually become the *literal* blood and body of Jesus Christ.

Paul Butler points out another error in this connection: "According to the Sacramentalists, this passage demands unflinching observance of the Lord's supper. They make the Sacrament the means of life. According to this teaching, the Christian, by absenting himself from the Lord's Table, cuts himself off from any contact with the saving blood of Jesus Christ. Carried to its logical conclusion, this doctrine is equally as heretical as the Roman Catholic's transubstantiation. The Sacramentalist theory comes very near the Roman system of meritorious works" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 249).

When Jesus says "I am the gate" (10:7) no one really imagines that he is anchored to hinges on a post. And when he says "I am the vine" (15:5) we do not understand him to mean that his feet are rooted in the ground. Yet there continue to be those who, like these Jews in the synagogue (5:52), misinterpret Jesus' statement about eating his flesh.

⁵³Jesus said to them, "I am telling you the truth: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him to life on the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I live in him. ⁵⁷The living Father sent me, and because of him I live also. In the same way whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This, then, is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread that your ancestors ate, but then later died. The one who eats this bread will live forever."

⁵⁹Jesus said this as he taught in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Jesus stresses that he is the source of life and will actually live in the person who loves, trusts, and obeys him. As Burton Coffman says, "Christ is to the soul what food and drink are to the body. Without food and drink, the body dies; without Christ the soul dies" (*Commentary on John*, p. 186). A starving man will not receive nourishment by staring through a grocery store window at all the food on the shelves. Nor will we receive spiritual nourishment unless we receive Christ as Lord.

Regarding 6:54, Frank Pack says: "Those who emphasize the sacramental interpretation, referring this primarily to the Lord's Supper, face the problem that this verse promises eternal life to those who eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man. What verse 53 has stated negatively, in Johannine fashion verse 54 states positively. The believer voluntarily takes Jesus into himself and receives eternal life as a present possession. He also receives the promise of eternal life in the resurrection *at the last day*" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 113).

Jesus' statements about eating his flesh and drinking his blood are difficult for the Jews to accept, especially since they choose to ignore the symbolism in his words. No orthodox Jew dared drink the blood of animals, for that was strictly forbidden on the grounds that life is in the blood (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10-14; Acts 15). But Jesus intends for us to understand that it is his life which we are to absorb.

Thought Stimulators on John 6:25-59

1. Where did the discussion of the "Bread of Life" take place?
2. What is wrong with being a "loaves and fishes" disciple?
3. Compare the "bread of life" with the manna given in the wilderness.

4. In what sense is Jesus the "bread of life"?
5. How has Jesus promised to respond to anyone who sincerely comes to him?
6. Prove by the scriptures whether it is possible for a Christian to fall from grace so as to be in a lost condition.
7. Why do some people apparently like to argue?
8. How are people "drawn" to Jesus?
9. When can we have eternal life?
10. Where does eternal life come from?
11. What does "eternal life" mean?
12. Does Jesus have reference to the Lord's Supper in these passages?
13. Explain the Roman Catholic doctrine of "transubstantiation."
14. Why did the Jews refuse to drink the blood of animals?
15. Write a 100 word essay (or poem) on how Jesus is the "bread" of *your* life.