

JESUS THE BREAD OF LIFE John ch 6

INTRODUCTION: The high price of meat and food. This reminds us of Philip's question, v. 5: "How are we going to buy bread to feed all of these people?"

I. IN THE THEME OF THE BREAD OF LIFE WE SEE A SOCIAL CONCERN.

A. Christ's concern for the economic needs of people is indicated in his feeding of the multitudes, 6:1-15.

B. Christ is sympathetic toward the physical and material needs of people.

C. This is the social aspect of the Gospel. The people had tracked him far up among the hills. They looked tired, and they were tired and hungry. They were a long way from the towns and shops. Christ's first thought for them was not about their souls, but how to meet their immediate urgent physical

requirements. That too is a part of the Christ we serve; and we must seek to grow up into his whole likeness. Here is humanity in Galilean Homespun.

The Gospels represent Jesus at times as a champion of the poor and depressed. He seeks release of captives, prisoners, and slaves. He denounces the scribes and religious leaders who "devour the houses of widows."

His treatment of women is radically opposed to the customs of that day. He took the first step toward the true liberation of women. He operates an out-patient clinic wherever he happens to be.

The social teaching of parables like "the Good Samaritan" and incidents like the rich young ruler have had a tremendous effect on his followers.

Jesus evaluated an individual's spiritual life not in terms of religious exercises, but in terms of ethical and social actions.

In the Parable of the Last Judgment, Jesus emphasized in the strongest possible terms the importance of such social work as the

feeding of the undernourished,
the care of the sick,
the rehabilitation of prisoners,
the clothing of the destitute,
and the housing of the homeless.
Jesus believed that religion should serve
people -- not that people should serve
religion.

If Jesus were here today he would be concerned about the 100,000 human beings on earth who die every day of starvation or malnutrition. He would care that over half of the world's three billion people live in perpetual hunger. He would think it strange that the family pet dog in the USA eats more and better than the average laborer in India.

For the Christian the "war on poverty and hunger" is not a political option. It is a responsibility based on the command of Jesus Christ, who loved the poor. "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren,

you have done it unto me."

II. IN THE THEME OF THE BREAD OF LIFE WE SEE A SPIRITUAL MEANING.

A. In this chapter we find three great "I Am" sayings of Jesus:

v 35: I am the Bread of Life.

v 41: I am the bread which came down
from heaven.

v 51: I am the Living Bread.

Not his message, but himself, gives life and sustains life in such abundance that no unsatisfied need remains to frustrate the believer.

Christ himself is that which feeds, sustains, and strengthens the Christian.

He said, "He that comes to me shall never hunger; and he that believes on me shall never thirst. (v 35)

When Jesus spoke of the Bread of Life, he meant not merely bread for the body, but food for the soul.

B. Jesus rejected the efforts of the people to force him to be king, to lead them to national freedom and material prosperity. v.15.

Many urged Christ to lay aside his own plans and adopt other easier plans more likely to succeed, in their opinion.

C. Jesus challenged people to spend their energy, not for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life. (vs 27)

~~THIS IS THE SPIRITUAL ASPECT OF THE GOSPEL.~~

Our Lord's primary interest was not the shoring up of a sagging social structure, but the ushering in of an altogether new order.

Any program of social concern must point men to--not away from--the central message of redemption through the blood of Christ.

Christ did not come to earth to be merely a Bread King.

What irritates Christ the most in our modern economic situation is not that material things are so badly distributed, but rather that they are so greatly over-valued.

D. Jesus rebuked the crowd for their low motives for following him. v 26.

1. Negatively--not because they saw the spiritual sign or meaning behind the feeding of the multitude. (6:14)

2. Positively--but because they ate their fill of free food.

They made two demands of Christ: "MORE MIRACLES," and "FREE BREAD." (TLB vs 30-31) They wanted sensationalism and material plenty.

So today many are interested, not in Christianity itself, but in the by-products of Christianity. (free food)

If religion will give (loaves and fishes,) better houses, shorter working hours, higher wages, lower prices, gadgets to lessen work and increase leisure--many would then follow Christ; but they don't want any of his spiritual demands.

III. IN THE THEME OF THE BREAD OF LIFE WE SEE A SIFTING RESULT AMONG THE DISCIPLES.

A. At this point many of the professed disciples left him.

They said "this is a hard saying." (v 60) They murmured and were offended and stumble at his teaching about the bread of life. Some of them did not really believe (v 64)

B. They offered two objections to what he said about the bread of life:

1. This is "merely Jesus (v 42) the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know."

"We are his neighbors."

"We know the whole family."

Familiarity breeds unbelief.

To this objection Jesus answered that only God's grace can draw people to himself. (v 44)

2. The second objection was based on a too literal an interpretation of Christ's exact words. They asked, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

The answer to this objection is that Christ was talking about a mystical union rather than about a material union between himself and the believer.

So, instead of great crowds coming to Jesus and following him, the crowds started leaving him in droves.

This teaches us a much-needed lesson today. To many Christians large numbers, packed pews, and great popularity are all important. They seem to be willing to accept people on any terms at all. Some assume that if the gospel is faithfully preached, great crowds will come to church. But Christ accepted people only on his terms. His preaching drove some of them away. It hurt him that they were interested in him only insofar as through him they might find some easing of their material difficulties and some increase in their comforts. But he preached a demanding gospel, whether the people liked it or not.

whether they were alienated or attracted,
whether they thronged to hear him
or would not listen.

He preached faithfully at the cost of
losing his crowd.

A great British preacher once went with
his wife to worship in the church of a
clergyman who passed his days in a buzz of
excited and adoring people, and noticing that
she was looking around her somewhat contemp-
tuously at a crowd that showed no visible
mood of worship, he whispered to her,
"It is all very well, my dear, but I could
not fill this place." "No," she replied,
"but you could empty it!"

The ranks around Jesus were so thinned
after this, and there were gaping spaces
opening everywhere,
and hundreds were streaming away from him;
he was far from certain of the continued
allegiance even of the twelve.

He asked, "Will you also go away?"

Here we see PETER'S MOMENT OF GREATNESS (68-69)
Peter was a man of extremes, passionate,
impulsive, apt to dare and risk more than
his faith could carry through,

He spoke for himself and the ten others:
"Going away? To whom?"

--There is no one else that can teach us
as you can teach us,

and give us what you can give us,
and be to us what you have been and are.
You have made life so full and meaningful
for us.And always other new and
exciting vistas keep opening up for us,
which we'd never see apart from you.
We have believed and have come to know that
you are the Holy One of God."

This is the equivalent of Peter's Great
Confession at Caesarea Philippi.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life. This shows his concern for mankind's physical, material, and economic needs.

But it does not stop with these needs.

He is supremely concerned about man's sins even more than about his hunger. He feeds the soul as well as the body.

And his message of spiritual redemption brings a sifting of men before his judgment seat. He turns no one away, but some turn away from him when they hear his full gospel with all its demands for real discipleship.

There is an offense in the cross.

But in the midst of this great discourse on the bread of life, are several great evangelistic invitations and promises.

He said, "No man can come to me unless the father draw him." (44)

~~and "whoever comes to me and believes in me, I will not cast out."~~ (V. 37)

Here are combined two things: God's initiative, (44) and man's responsibility. (37)

God is now doing his part; he is drawing you by the Holy Spirit. Your responsibility is to decide voluntarily to come to Jesus. *while we sing*

Will you come to him who is the "Bread of the world in mercy broken,

By whom the words of life were spoken" ? ~~while we sing?~~

Petaluma, CA - Aug. 73
Bangkok - June 75
Norwood B.C. - Jan. '86