

## John 6:21-29

### Laboring for the Right Kind of Meat

*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed – v. 27*

After Christ fed the multitude which consisted of 5,000 males, I think that crowd demonstrated how prone the natural man is toward a kind of socialistic government in which that government provides for the wants and needs of the people. It's no wonder they wanted to make Christ king following this miracle. They recognized a good thing when they saw it. If Christ, as their king could continue to provide for them this way there would be no need for them to work and earn their own bread. The directive that God had given man in the garden of Eden when man fell into sin could be set aside. You remember that directive from Gen. 3:19 *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground...*

That need not be the case any longer, so they may have reasoned. Why would we eat our bread in the sweat of our faces when our king can simply provide it for us the way he has just done. And thus they could enter into a kind of welfare state where their king would provide their bread for them from that time on. There can be little doubt that this was the way they were thinking when you read Christ's words in v. 26 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*

It would seem that they could not get beyond their current world. Their focus was so much on the here and now that they couldn't see ahead into eternity. In this respect they resemble many Christians today. Indeed I think if we're honest we'd have to acknowledge that there are times when we become so attached to this world that we find it hard to get beyond it.

Christ, however, makes it very clear that His coming into this world served a purpose that went way above and beyond this present evil world. That's why He had no interest in becoming their king. It was and is certainly true that He would be a king but as He Himself would say to Pontius Pilate when Pilate interrogated Him: *My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

There's a sense in which He was conveying that same message to the Jews in John 6. For in the intense discussion that follows we find Him speaking spiritually and speaking of Himself as the source of soul satisfaction and speaking not about the short span of time we spend in this world but speaking rather of eternal life.

Now whenever you read in the gospel narratives you should pay very close attention to the exhortations that are given. It's important to know the meaning of those exhortations as well as the setting for those exhortations. The setting of the exhortation I have in mind just

now is the setting of a contrast between this present world and a better world to come. And it's an exhortation that we do well to heed because of our own propensities to become so tied to this present world. Listen again to Christ's exhortation given to us in v. 27:

*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

I want you to hear this exhortation from Christ this morning and I want you to hear Him speaking not so much to the Jews of His day who would fiercely contend with Him and would find themselves scratching their heads trying to understand what He meant and eventually becoming offended by Him. I want you instead to hear the words of this exhortation as Christ speaking directly to you. *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

The title of this message as well as its' theme is:

## Laboring for the Right Kind of Meat

How do you labor for the right kind of meat? Consider with me first of all that we labor for the right kind of meat:

### I. By Seeing the Difference Between the Right Kind of Meat and the Wrong Kind of Meat

Do you see from the text the negative and positive elements of it? There's a kind of meat (food) that you're not to labor for and there's a kind that you are to labor for. *Labor not for the meat that perisheth.*

I'm reminded as I read Christ's words that every time you go to the grocery store to buy groceries, you come across expiration dates that are stamped on various items. You wouldn't buy a gallon of milk that has an expiration date on it that had passed two days ago. In fact you might reach for a gallon that is toward the back of the row because that gallon will have an expiration date that's further ahead than the gallons toward the front.

And when you visit the produce section of the store, you want the fruit that is not yet fully ripe instead of the fruit that looks like it was at its peak a day ago. You look for green bananas rather than black ones. That kind of mentality, you know, provides a good way for you to view the covenant of works. Living by the covenant of works is like buying that gallon of milk that expired a week ago. You wouldn't want it. You can't use it for anything.

Now I think it's very important when we view the words of our text to keep in mind what Christ meant and what He didn't mean. He didn't mean that His followers were to stop working. He was not in this instance nullifying the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment. That commandment, you know, not only calls for a day of rest but it also calls for 6 days of labor. *Six days shalt*

*thou labour, and do all thy work: 10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God.*

Christ is not now contradicting that command. And even though you might think to yourself that what I'm saying is so obvious that it scarcely needs to be said, it seems that there have been Christians dating all the way back to the early church that did think that way. When Paul addresses the Christians at Thessalonica he has to raise that issue with them. So we read in 2Thess. 3:10-12 *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.*

The Thessalonian epistles, you know, place so much focus on the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ that it seems that there were those who thought that His coming was so near that there was need to work, certainly no need to pursue a career or to plan ahead for retirement. And Paul had to correct their mistaken notions.

Given, then, the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment and given Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians that they be engaged in work, we need to ask ourselves, then, what exactly does Christ mean when He says *labor not for the meat that perisheth*? We know that Christ would not contradict the Word of God, so what does He mean?

Perhaps the best illustration of His meaning could be found in the parable He taught in Lk. 12:15ff *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. 16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: 17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? 18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. 20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? 21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

Doesn't this parable bring into very clear and sharp focus what Christ means when He says *labor not for the meat that perisheth*. You could say that He's giving His audience a world-view lesson. And basically what He's saying is don't live for this present evil world. Don't live as if this world is all that there is. It's the temporalness of this world, you see that compels John to write in his first epistle: *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1Jn. 2:15-17).*

Earlier in our service we read from Eccles. 5. You could say that the entire book of Ecclesiastes is devoted to the transitory nature of this world. It's all vain – or to use the author's words – it's all *vanity and vexation of spirit*. The word *vanity* means *breath*. Very soon the temperatures here in Indiana are going to drop to the point where you can see your breath. How long does each breath last when you're able to see your breath?

Think of the world in terms of the duration of the visibility of that breath. That's how transitory this world is. Why would your focus in life be so geared to something that's passing so quickly? Now remember what I said in my earlier remarks. We are commanded to work. We must give attention to the things of this world. And it's also true that God's Word doesn't pass by our time in this world so completely that it doesn't minister to us while we're in this world.

God's Word goes a long way in guiding and encouraging you for your time in this world. But do you remember the words of Paul to the Corinthians in 1Cor. 15? 1Cor. 15:19 *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*. If your religion can't get you beyond this world then it certainly doesn't serve you well. And if you're so geared to this world that you're devoted whole-heartedly to building bigger barns then you're going to be miserable.

You've lost sight of the temporal nature of this world and you've lost sight of the other kind of meat Christ mentions. There is, you see, not only that meat that perisheth, but there is that meat that endureth to everlasting life. Certainly that meat can correspond to becoming rich toward God and that meat can correspond to the kind of treasure Christ mentions in the Sermon on the Mount: *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal*.

I think you get a pretty clear view of this kind of treasure when you visit that passage of Scripture in Mt. 25 that shows you the dividing of the sheep from the goats before Christ. There are those on Christ's right hand and those on His left. And to those on His right hand He extends the invitation to them to *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world* (Mt. 25:34). And the thing they are commended for is the way they ministered to each other and took each other to heart and ministered to each other's needs. That's how you become rich toward God. That's how you labor for the meat that does not perish.

And this kind of labor takes into account your prayers and your simple deeds. Isn't that what you want at the end of the day? Won't the *well done good and faithful servant* coming from the Lord be way more valuable than all the world's goods that you can accumulate? – or the world's delights that you can heap to yourself?

This is the first thing we must do, then, if we're going to labor for the right kind of meat. We have to make some value judgment about what truly is valuable and what is at best temporal.

But let's think next that if you would labor for the right kind of meat, you must do so:

## II. By Knowing What It Means to Labor

Did you notice in the text something that on the surface of it seems to be contradictory? Look at v. 27 again: *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.* You're to labor for the meat which endures to everlasting life, and yet this meat is something that Christ, the Son of man will give you.

Here's the question, then – how do you labor for something that will be given to you? Haven't we been taught from our earliest days even as children for some of you that salvation cannot be gained by works but it comes as a free gift? Doesn't it seem as if Christ is now saying that even though it's a free gift you have to work for it?

And here again, just as we noted in the last point that Christ doesn't contradict His own Word so does that apply to what we're now considering. And so the question before us now is how do you labor for that which Christ gives? And one of the ways you perform that labor is to labor in your mind – i.e. labor to gain the right understanding of the gospel. Don't be like the Jews that Paul refers to in Rom. 10:3 who *being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*

Theirs was a wrong striving and a striving in the end that led to failure. Oh they labored. You could say they were even laboring for the right kind of meat – for that which endures to everlasting life, but in the end they didn't reach it because even though they were striving for the right thing they were striving in the wrong way.

Now I find it interesting that in our text in John 6 the Jews asked Christ a very good question. Too bad they didn't understand His answer. Look at the words of v. 28 *Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?* That's a very good question and it certainly follows what Christ had just said to them when He said *Labor for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life.* How do we do that? – that's what they wanted to know. How do we work the works of God so that we may gain this blessing of everlasting life that you're telling us about?

And here's Christ's answer – may you hear it in the depth of your heart – v. 29 *Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*

Are you beginning to see, now, how you labor for the right meat? This is a call to tend to your faith. Ro 10:17 *So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* This is a call to spend time in God's Word so that you become grounded in the glorious truths of Christ and the truths of the Gospel of Christ.

I love the way Solomon says this in Prov. 4. Prov. 4:5-9: *Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. 6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. 7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. 8 Exalt her, and she*

*shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. 9 She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.*

And when it comes to the diligence or the fervency or the intensity with which this understanding is to be pursued, listen to the way Solomon puts it in Prov. 2:1-6:

*My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; 2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; 3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; 4 If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; 5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*

Do you see the two ideas coming together in these verses that are identical to the ideas Christ sets forth in our text? Christ tells us to labor or to work. The wise author of Proverbs tells us to do the same thing and to do so with the same diligence that a treasure hunter seeks silver and pursues hid treasures. And then Christ says that the Son of man will give you this meat which endures to everlasting life and does the wise author of Proverbs tell us that the Lord gives wisdom and out of his mouth there comes knowledge and understanding.

This is how you labor, then, for that meat that endures to everlasting life. You cultivate your faith. If I could borrow from Peter's words in his first epistle – 1Pet:1:10,11: *Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.*

Search out salvation – that's how you labor for the meat that endureth to everlasting life. Search it out so you're able to make your calling and election sure. Search it out so that you find yourself moved to reverence and awe at all that went in to your salvation in terms of it being planned in eternity past, then executed by Christ in His life and death and resurrection, then applied to your heart by the gracious and powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

I find it interesting that in that same portion of Scripture in 1Pet 1, Peter mentions in v. 12 how the angels desire to look into these things. Even though the angels are not the subjects of salvation, even though it doesn't directly involve them, still they love to look into it because they see how brightly the glory of Christ shines in salvation. That's a part of our labor in searching out salvation. We search it out not only that we make sure we have an interest in it but we search it out so that we're moved to reverence and awe by it.

So we've seen that if we're going to labor for the right kind of meat, we need to make the right value judgment when it comes to the meat that perishes and the meat that endures to everlasting life. And we have to know exactly what it means to labor. It means to tend to your faith so that your life is lived by faith and your faith is generated by love – love to Christ and love to the brethren and love to our fellow men.

It remains for us to consider that if you would labor for the right kind of meat, you must do so:

### III. By Drawing Your Assurance from Christ

Would you notice the very last words of our text: *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

When you think of something that's sealed, you think of it as being authenticated and genuine. When you receive a diploma upon graduating from college that diploma will have affixed to it the seal of the institution that's awarding that diploma. Sometimes you see advertisements of certain products that are sealed with a Good housekeeping seal or the seal of some accrediting agency that evaluates products for their high quality.

Christ was sealed by His Father. You could say He was sealed when He was baptized and the Holy Spirit, as a dove, descended upon Him and all who were there heard the voice of God the Father saying with regard to His Son – *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* Oh there's an impressive seal of approval. The Holy Spirit descends on Him and His Father commends Him.

And when you think of the importance of the issues that Christ addresses during His time in this world, it good to know that He has the seal of God's approval. Who better to listen to, then, when He speaks of meat that endures to everlasting life? And in a time like our time when there are so many religious voices clamoring to be heard and so many variations and strange ideas coming from so many sources throughout the world, isn't it good to know that there is One who speaks that we can trust? And we know we can trust Him because He's been sealed by the Father?

There's a sense, you know, in which you and I are sealed as well. Eph 1:13 *In whom ye also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.* This sealing of the Spirit is what should mark you as being genuine and authentic. Have you ever noticed that when you talk to a Christian there's something about him that enables you to recognize that he's real? He's not playing at religion but he truly believes in Christ and demonstrates his belief by how he lives and talks and treats others. And even though you might have some disagreements with him on secondary things, you can nevertheless tell that he's real.

So can we tell that Christ is true, that He really is the Son of God and the Son of man. John's gospel was written to convince you of that and to remind you of that even when you're convinced. And if you take Christ to be sealed by His Father then that means you can take Him at His Word when He speaks to you of everlasting life and when He speaks of Himself as being the source of that life. So hear His Word this morning and hear it as coming from One who is sealed of His Father when He says to you *Labour not for the*

*meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*