

4. Jesus' feeding of the multitude was the springboard for what transpired the next day. Again, John's recognition of Jesus as the incarnate Logos – God's climactic and complete communication to men expressed in tangible form – is the premise behind the pattern he followed in constructing his gospel record. Jesus is the full realization of God's "word" as it is a *speech act* (a speech act is an utterance considered as an action in that it prescribes, directs, promises, purposes, enacts, etc.), and John presented Jesus accordingly by conjoining His actions and His words in mutually-interpretive relation. Repeatedly throughout his account John records Jesus acting and then speaking to His actions so as to explain their true significance. So it is here: The so-called Bread of Life Discourse was Jesus' commentary on His action the previous day.
  - a. John introduced the discourse by setting the scene. He recorded that the day after Jesus fed the multitude they returned to discover that He was gone. They'd seen Him stay behind after sending away His disciples (ref. again Matthew 14:22-23) and He gave no indication that He was leaving when He dismissed the assembly. Thus many who'd participated in the feeding came back the next day expecting to find Jesus still in the same area. But they found neither Jesus nor the small boat in which His disciples had departed and concluded that He must have left to rejoin them. Shortly after, several boats from Tiberias landed at the shore and the group – at least as many as could fit – took those boats and left for Capernaum in the hope of finding Jesus there (6:22-24).
  - b. John provided no details regarding their search, recording only that they were able to locate Jesus somewhere in the vicinity of Capernaum. Given the stir that followed Him, it would not have been difficult to find Him and, when they did, the group approached Jesus and asked Him when He'd arrived there (6:25). Here, as so often in His interaction with people, Jesus didn't answer their question, but gave a response which showed that He recognized the agenda they had in coming to Him. They weren't interested in *Him*, or even His signs as they testified of Him (5:36, 10:22-38); they'd come looking for Him because they were hoping to enjoy another full stomach at His hand (6:26). (Perhaps some were also still hoping to convince Him to take up the messianic scepter and lead an Israelite army against the occupying powers.) They had demonstrated that they were willing to go to great lengths to obtain from Jesus a meal whose benefit would be short-lived; instead they ought to expend their effort to gain from Him food by which they would be filled forever (6:27). For He was not simply a miracle worker; He was the *Son of Man*: a man whose life, calling, authority, power and work originated with and were certified by His heavenly Father (cf. 3:33) – the One who is Israel's God and Father (ref. again 1:51, 3:13, 5:26-27; cf. also 6:53-62).

It's clear that these Israelites really didn't grasp Jesus' meaning. They heard Him exhorting them to exert themselves toward the goal of eternal life, but this was the same message taught by all of Israel's rabbis (6:25). They recognized such labors as the "works of God" – the works of devotion and faithfulness to which Yahweh called His covenant people in the Scriptures (ref. again 5:39). Their only question was which of those works Jesus was specifically calling them to (6:28).

When the Jews thought of “works” which Yahweh commanded and which were pleasing to Him – works that were unto eternal life, they thought of *Torah*. Thus Jesus’ answer must have startled those questioning Him. Rather than directing them toward certain works of piety and obedience prescribed by the Torah, He told them that the work of God – the work which the God of Israel required of His covenant “son” Israel – was to believe in the One whom He sent (6:29). Two implications of this answer immediately come into view:

- 1) The first is that Jesus was here connecting Himself with Torah. Torah set forth the way of obedience, righteousness and life to which Yahweh called Israel, but now Jesus was insisting that that way was somehow tied to faith in Him. This idea builds upon His previous statement regarding the Scriptures (5:39) and highlights John’s fundamental theme of Jesus as the incarnate Logos. If Torah was Yahweh’s word to Israel *inscripturated*, Jesus was Yahweh’s word *incarnated* (ref. again 1:14-18).
- 2) The second implication follows from this: Jesus was connecting Himself with Torah, not in terms of correlation, augmentation or replacement, but in terms of *fulfillment*. He wasn’t saying that embracing Him in faith is another “work” which God requires in addition to obedience to Torah, but that the instruction and prescriptions embodied in Torah were prophetic and preparatory pointers that, by divine design, had their ultimate meaning and realization in Him. Paul expressed this truth as Torah being Israel’s pedagogue until the coming of the Seed with whom Torah was concerned. So Jesus insisted that the Scripture – with its centerpiece in the Torah – testified of Him. Thus, now, in the fullness of the times, obedience to Torah and faithfulness to Yahweh consists in faith in the One in whom all of Yahweh’s promises and prescriptions are “yes and amen.”

The “work of God” was to embrace His Messiah in faith, and this embrace consists, not in theoretical or theological agreement and acceptance, but in owning Jesus as the One in whom men find authentic life and true relationship with God. John certainly understood this truth, even as he emphasized that Jesus embodies in Himself the fulfillment of Yahweh’s promise to restore His sanctuary and return to dwell in it. In this way Jesus is also the conjunction of heaven and earth and the place where men encounter and worship God (4:19-25). Thus Israel’s return to Yahweh in truth amounts to Israel’s embrace of her Messiah.

Again, it’s important to recognize the distinction between Israel’s “faith” and the faith Jesus called for: The people of Israel believed Yahweh’s promises recorded in the Scriptures and trusted that He would be faithful to fulfill them. They longed for their Messiah and all that His coming would mean for Israel’s restoration and the establishment of Yahweh’s kingdom. For the most part, the children of Israel didn’t disbelieve and reject Jesus because they had no faith in their God; rather, the problem was that their faith was *natural*; they clung to their notions of His purposes and promises (ref. Romans 10; cf. also Acts 9 with 1 Timothy 1:12-13).

c. A completely full stomach was a luxury for most in Israel, and so it's not surprising that those who'd experienced Jesus' abundant provision the day before were willing to go to such great effort to locate Him in the hope of another meal. Jesus knew why they sought Him and He exhorted them to direct their effort toward food which endures to eternal life. They questioned how they were to execute that "work" and Jesus explained that it amounts to believing in Him. Their follow-up question betrayed two important truths: *They didn't understand what He was talking about and really didn't care because their concern was focused elsewhere.* The only thing they heard in Jesus' words was an opportunity to get back to the matter which held their attention. Of course, they couldn't expose their actual concern and so pretended to embrace Jesus' exhortation:

- They were eager to do this "work" and believe in Him as Israel's Messiah, but in order to do so they needed a confirming sign. Even Moses had performed miraculous signs to demonstrate that he was Yahweh's chosen prophet and leader; could Jesus expect to do any less (ref. again 6:14)?
- And though the manna wasn't one of those signs, the people of Israel closely associated it with Moses. This is evident in Jesus' response which suggests that these Jews were connecting the *he* of their citation (v. 31) with Moses rather than God.

In their minds, the provision of manna was a Mosaic sign which supported his status and claims. What, then, could be more appropriate than that Jesus would perform the same sort of sign in order to garner Israel's faith in Him as Messiah.

d. Once again Jesus knew exactly where these men were going in their interaction with Him; they came seeking a meal and their desire had now settled on the hope that He'd provide them bread – preferably unending bread – like Moses had done for their fathers centuries earlier. Indeed, it was Jesus' intent to give bread to the children of Israel – *not common bread as the day before or even bread in the likeness of manna, but the true bread which the manna prefigured* (6:32-33).

In introducing this bread, the first thing Jesus did was clarify the source of the manna (vv. 31-32). This was critically important because of the type/antitype relationship between Israel's manna and the bread which Jesus was going to provide. That is, the manna pointed to a future counterpart and the primary point of correspondence between them is that they are both "heavenly bread" – bread which Yahweh gave to Israel. Thus Jesus' discussion of this true bread needed to begin with the reminder that the manna came down out of heaven from Israel's God, not as Moses' bestowal. Moses had explained the manna and its use to the people, but it was Yahweh's supernatural, transcendent provision (the word *manna* means "what is it?") to sustain and nourish Israel, His covenant son. And so it was with the bread Jesus was ready to provide: "*It is My Father who **now gives** you the true bread out of heaven.*" Moreover, this bread wouldn't be confined to Israel, but would give life to the entire world (v. 33).

Moses was not the source, but the human instrument through which Yahweh nourished and sustained the lives of His people. In similar fashion – and itself another point of typological correspondence – Jesus was the Father’s instrument for this new work of sustenance and nourishment. But unlike Moses, who merely explained and administered the manna, Jesus *embodied in Himself* this new bread which the manna prefigured (cf. Deuteronomy 8:3 with John 1:1, 14). Thus, when the group asked Jesus to give them this “living bread” as a permanent bestowal (cf. the Samaritan woman’s response to Jesus’ offer of “living water” – 4:13-15), He responded that *He* is that bread (6:34-35). Just as the one who drinks the living water He gives will never thirst (note how Jesus here connected never thirsting with *believing in Him* – cf. 7:37-38), so those who eat the living bread by *coming to Him* will never hunger. Jesus conjoined the satiation of hunger and thirst and He did so in terms of the concepts of coming to Him and believing in Him. The implication is that these two belong together: *Those who come to Him in truth believe in Him and all who believe in Him have come to Him in truth.*

This is important, because Jesus was speaking to a group of people who *had* come to Him; indeed they had eagerly sought Him out because of firm convictions they had regarding Him. They had come to Him, but they didn’t *believe* in Him (6:36). They asked Jesus for a sign in order to believe in Him and He was showing them the sign that is *Himself* – Yahweh’s “bread of life” out of heaven which is greater than the manna, but still they didn’t believe. And because they didn’t believe in Him, they really hadn’t *come* to Him in the way Jesus was speaking of. And having not come to Him in truth, they could not hope to have either their hunger or their thirst truly satisfied.

This highlights again John’s key theme of Israel’s “believing unbelief.” These Israelites believed that Jesus had the power and resource to feed them; He did indeed and He came into the world to do just that. But they had no grasp of or genuine interest in the food and drink He had for them – the bread and water which would satisfy forever the hunger and thirst untouchable by natural resource.

- e. Jesus came from His Father to convey His own life to the world of men. His will and work expressed the will and work of Israel’s God, and this was His answer to all who accused Him of lawlessness or an autonomous will contra Yahweh and His Torah. He was doing His Father’s work according to His Father’s will, and that will – and the work it prescribed – was to restore and regather the alienated world back to Himself. Jesus understood this, but few in Israel did. Most concluded that those who embraced and followed Him had been duped and led away from Israel’s God; thus the radical nature of Jesus’ insistence that those who came to Him in faith were actually *given to Him* by that same God. And because He was of one mind and purpose with His Father, He gladly received His Father’s gift; all who came to Him would find life in His welcome embrace and preserving hand. Not only would He not cast them out, He pledged to keep them in His life and love in view of the day when He will consummate His life in them by giving them bodies conforming to His own (6:37-40; cf. Philippians 3:20-4:1).