

True Bread from Heaven

John 6:29-40

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²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” ³⁰ So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?” ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Introduction: Satisfaction, Salvation & Security

What are people searching for in life? What’s the connection between our desire for romantic love, our desire for a bigger house and a better paying job, our desire for a great vacation and our desire to make a difference in the world around us? Almost all people desire these things on some basic level, whether they admit it or not, so is there a pattern that holds them together and makes the parts fit into a whole?

Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias suggests that we go through life in four stages of longing or seeking: In early childhood, we are seeking wonder, and our life is filled with awe at every new experience. In later childhood, we are seeking truth, as our minds absorb information like sponges and we want to know the truth about everything. Then, as we transition toward adulthood, we seek love, wanting a loving commitment filled with romantic intimacy. Finally, as we grow older, we seek security, looking for stability, strength and preservation of ourselves and our assets. Zacharias then says that all four of these quests we enter during our lives point us to God, who alone can fully and eternally satisfy our souls’ hunger for wonder, truth, love and security.

In today’s passage, I see three similar things that people are seeking, though they are a bit different. For the sake of making them easier to remember, we’ll call them satisfaction, salvation and security. People are seeking satisfaction, fulfillment. The crowd thinks they’ll find it in bread, but Jesus says they’ll only find it in Him. The crowd also knows enough about God to seek salvation, and they think they’ll find it in their religious works. Jesus tells them they will find it only in Him. Finally, the crowd seeks security, in the ushering in of God’s end-times kingdom, which they think will come with the coming of Messiah and the overthrow of Rome. Jesus tells them that true security can also only be found in Him.

Let’s walk through this passage together and see how these crucial issues are addressed:

Before we get to verse 30, let’s review for just a minute what we learned last week. Remember that the Jewish crowd wanted to know what works they needed to do to be doing the works of God. They asked this

in verse 28 and Jesus responded in verse 29: *Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”*

So Jesus pushes aside their desire for a religious works task list and instead calls them to put their faith in Him.

A. Seeking a Sign or Begging for Bread? (30-31)

Looking to Believe or Hoping to Receive a Handout

Well, the crowd responds to this statement of Jesus by issuing Him a challenge:

So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

We need to remember, of course, that Jesus has just miraculously performed a wonderful sign in the feeding of the 5,000. We need to also remember that when the crowd first approached Jesus in verse 25, asking Him when He crossed the Sea of Galilee, He had said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” In other words, they witnessed the miraculous feeding but missed the reality of it as the sign it was, pointing to Him as the Son of Man, the Messiah.

So now, when the crowd asks for a sign, what are they really seeking? If they were sincerely seeking a sign, that would mean they were seeking to put their faith in Jesus, but they just wanted some validation before doing so, to make sure they weren’t going to put their faith in a false Messiah. But that’s not at all what they’re doing. They suggest to Jesus the sign of the manna for a reason: They are still focused on getting free food.

Last week, I commented that most of the average working man’s daily wages went toward feeding his family. If people wanted anything extra besides food – clothing, dishes, furniture, oil, etc. – they typically had to save the small portion of their income that didn’t go to food for a long time, and they also probably had to pick up additional work to be done after hours or by other members of the family. We need to keep in mind that this is the way most people throughout history have lived, and it is still the way most people in the world today live. In the United States, the median household income is \$56,000, but it’s under \$10,000 worldwide. A more sobering statistic is that 71% of the world’s population lives on less than \$10 per day.

But beyond the practical reality of poverty, this exchange shows us something about human nature that we have observed repeatedly in this chapter: We tend to think that our most pressing needs are physical and that our deepest longings can be satisfied materially. So this crowd suggests manna from heaven as an appropriate sign because they’re convinced that if their daily need for food were miraculously met, then they would finally be truly satisfied.

B. Who Gives True Bread, Moses or God? (32-35)

What is the True Bread of Life?

Jesus responds to their demand for this kind of sign by calling their attention to God and not to Moses: *Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.”*

It seems like Jesus is rebuking them for placing too much emphasis on Moses and not enough directly on God. Hebrews tells us that Moses was faithful in all God’s house, and he was. But Moses was not God and was not

the deliverer and provider for God's people. The people of Israel had been waiting for a new Moses, a new hero to come along and lead them out of bondage and into freedom and to give them a new set of rules to follow in the renewed and reinvigorated kingdom of God.

Jesus wants them to see that someone better than Moses has arrived, but they first need to stop worshipping Moses as the deliverer and provider and see that God is the only One who truly delivers and provides.

And what does God provide? Well, now Jesus suddenly shifts to the present tense and gets personal, too: "*My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.*" This surprising turn of phrase actually connects back to what the crowd had said when they quoted Scripture in verse 31: *as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'*"

The crowd was probably quoting Psalm 78:24, which the ESV renders as "*and he rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven.*" The fact that the crowd was expecting this sign from a new Moses was evidence of their mis-placed focus, for it is God and not Moses who praised in Psalm 78 for this. But Jesus picks up on this reference and says not "He . . . gave them the grain of heaven" but rather in the present tense, "*My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.*"

Jesus then further elaborates: "*For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*"

Now the crowd should have realized at this point that Jesus was not talking about physical bread, but their minds were confused, and so they respond in a very similar way as the woman at the well in John 4 when Jesus offered her living water: *They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'*

Jesus now makes His claim explicitly clear: "*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*"

We hunger with a hunger which nothing in this world can satisfy. You can be stuffed bloated from an all-you-can-eat buffet, amazed that you could manage to eat all that you just ate, and still be hungry with this hunger. Likewise, we thirst with a thirst which nothing in this world can ever satisfy, and Jesus says that true satisfaction is found only in Him.

When Jesus says "whoever comes to me" and "whoever believes in me," He is describing the same thing in two different ways: We must come to Jesus in faith. We come to Him when we believe in Him. He also uses the present tense, which does hold out the idea that this is an ongoing coming and believing. So, He's not saying that once you believe and turn to Him in faith, you never experience this soul-deep hunger and thirst again, but rather that whenever we hunger and thirst in this way and we turn to Jesus and believe in Jesus, we will always find satisfaction for our souls. We will never trust in Jesus, and come to Him in faith, and still find Him unsatisfying.

C. Belief vs. Unbelief: What Makes the Difference? (36-37)

"All that the Father gives me will come to me"

But the sad truth is that many people never come to Jesus and never believe in Him. Right after Jesus said, "*whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst,*" He said, "*But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.*"

So, what makes the difference? Our culture likes to say that "seeing is believing," but what Jesus says here directly contradicts this popular saying. So, if seeing does not make the difference in the matter of salvation,

what does? Why do some people come to Jesus and receive the gift of eternal life, while some people see and yet not believe?

Jesus clearly states the truth in verse 37: *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”* Even though this crowd was skeptical and disbelieving, still Jesus’ mission as Messiah does not fail. But the success of Jesus’ mission as Messiah never depends ultimately on human will but on God. The Father gives people to the Son, and whoever the Father gives will come, and whoever comes will not ever be rejected or ejected.

Some people try to set the Father’s giving and our coming against each other, but Jesus teaches that they work together. It is the Father’s giving that makes our coming possible and it is our coming that makes the Father’s giving fruitful. When Jesus says, *“all that the Father gives me will come to me,”* it is clear that the root cause of our salvation is in the giving of the Father, but it is also clear that the giving of the Father always leads to our coming to Jesus.

If you want to know whether the Father has given you to the Son, the right question to ask is, *“Have you come to the Son, believing in Him?”* If you have, then the Son will never reject you, and if you have, it is because the Father has given you to His Son. Your faith is not an accident.

D. Where Do We Find Secure Salvation? (38-40)

Jesus is committed to doing the will of His Father

So, we have seen that true satisfaction is found in Jesus alone, the true bread from heaven. We have seen that our salvation by faith in Him comes from God the Father giving us to Christ. Now, how do we have any assurance of our security in Him?

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

Throughout the Gospel of John, one of the clear themes is that Jesus came from heaven to do the will of His Father. He is absolutely committed to doing His Father’s will. And it is His Father’s will that nothing of all that the Father has given the Son should be lost.

So, for our security in our salvation, we have two strong assurances: The will of the Father in giving us to Jesus and the commitment of Jesus to fulfilling the will of His Father. Only if the will of the Father and the commitment of the Son can be broken can we be lost if we have come to Jesus for eternal life!

Notice again the parallel in this passage between *“all that He has given me”* in verse 39 & *“everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him”* in verse 40. These phrases clearly refer to the same group of people, and Jesus doubly emphasizes the security of all of the people in this group: *“ALL that He has given me”* and *“EVERYONE who looks on the Son and believes in Him”* will have eternal life and will be raised up by Jesus on the last day.

Conclusion: Raised Up on the Last Day

Perhaps, though, our doubts and fears persist, even though we have the will of the Father in giving us to the Son and the commitment of the Son to lose none of those whom the Father has given. Our doubts and fears are stubborn things, especially when they are fueled by the enemy of our souls.

So, Jesus gives us even stronger assurance of our security by twice pledging, not just to never cast out any who come to Him, but to raise us up on the last day. Jesus goes all the way to the end of our salvation and pledges twice that He will raise up all whom the Father has given Him and all who look to Him and believe on the last day.

This is such a glorious promise and such an anchor for our souls in seasons of trial and distress. Jesus sits at God's right hand right now, ever living to make intercession for all whom the Father has given Him, for all who have come to Him, for all who have looked to Him and believed on Him. He has given His word that He will raise all those who trust in Him on the last day.

What does He mean by raising us up on the last day? Well, Paul gives us a stirring vision of this coming last day in I Corinthians 15:50-57:

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then Paul gives us the application of this certain victory, this coming transformation in verse 58:

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.