

Although many will not believe Jesus or his teaching because they seek earthly instead of heavenly nourishment, those whom the Father gives to Jesus will believe in him by feeding on him, and thereby gain eternal resurrection life.

Introduction – The crowds who experienced the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 followed Jesus to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus answers three crucial questions about eternal life.

I. The Work of God: What does God want us to do to gain eternal life?

A. Don’t seek earthly nourishment by *working* for that which perishes (vv. 25-27a)

Jesus knew the motives of those who sought him. There is no fooling him because he is God. Jesus knew the people were seeking him for more food. He exposed them for what they were: not spiritual seekers, but crass materialists. Jesus says don’t labor for food (or any other treasure) that perishes (Mt 6:19-21). That kind of work will never satisfy because the things of this world are perishable.

B. Do seek heavenly nourishment by *believing* in the one God has sent (vv. 27b-29)

1. So the crowds ask a reasonable question: what is the “work” of God that Jesus is alluding to? They expect a reasonable answer: something to do. There are rabbinic sources that say heavenly food symbolizes the Torah (the Law). This line of reason may be behind the Jews’ question linking food that endures to eternal life with keeping the Law.

2. Jesus gives a radical answer: believe in me. He even claimed God set his seal of authenticity and approval on him. God’s seal proves that Jesus will provide the food that endures to eternal life. But they missed this critical detail: the food Jesus provides for eternal life is a *gift* from the Son of Man. They stumbled on the rock of offense, trying to gain salvation through the law (Rom 9:31-33). He doesn’t sell it, but gives it freely to all who believe in him (cf. Isa 55; Rev 3:18).

II. The Sign of God: Who is Jesus, and how does he give eternal life?

A. Jesus is the sign of God, the true bread from heaven (vv. 30-32, 58)

1. The crowds were seeking a sign greater than Moses giving manna to their Israelite forefathers in the wilderness (cf. Dt 18:20-22). The spiritual descendants of these skeptics want Jesus to prove his claim. Apparently the miracle of feeding the 5000 was not impressive enough for them to believe Jesus. They wanted Jesus to outdo Moses, or they would not believe.

2. The Jews expected that God would once again provide manna from heaven in the messianic age through the Messiah’s ministry. Thus the entire “Bread of Life” passage is presented as fulfillment of the Exodus and Passover events. Obviously the crowds had missed the point of Jesus’ miracle: a sign to fulfill the symbolism of Moses’ miracle.

3. Jesus contrasts true bread from heaven with the manna in the wilderness. He does not mean that the wilderness manna was “false”, but that it was temporal, physical, material and a shadowy/typological reflection of the eternal and spiritual bread from heaven that by comparison is the “true” bread. Jesus correctly pointed them to the true source of manna: the Father in heaven. Jesus as the Bread of Life is better than the manna that came to the Israelites in the wilderness. The forefathers ate the manna from heaven and died. It was not the source of life; it only sustained nourishment in the wilderness. The manna pointed to the bread that truly gives eternal life. The fulfillment is Jesus, the Bread of Life from heaven.

B. Jesus comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (vv. 33-35)

How is Jesus the “bread of life”? He nourishes people spiritually and satisfies their spiritual longing/hunger. Those who feed on him shall never hunger. Their deep spiritual longings and needs, rooted in the desire to know God, will be satisfied in him. “Bread of life” is an apt image because it communicates our daily need for Jesus. Just as we need to eat food often to live, we need to feed upon Jesus often by believing in him daily.

C. Jesus gives eternal life to believers as they “feed” on him (vv. 53-57)

1. A hard saying of Jesus. On the face of it, Jesus’ words are offensive, and many in the crowd are offended at this carnal way of speaking. But of course Jesus didn’t mean people must eat his flesh and drink his blood cannibalistically, for no one has ever done that. Furthermore, the law of God forbade the eating and drinking of blood, let alone human blood (Gen 9:4; Lev 7:26-27; 17:10-14; Dt 12:23-24), hence their offended response. In the OT, blood is viewed as the seat of life. Life is in the blood (Lev 17:11).

2. So what does Jesus mean by “eat the flesh of the Son of Man”? To “eat” Jesus is to satisfy spiritual hunger. The words for “whoever feeds” (*ho trōgōn*) are striking in this context. It doesn’t mean just to eat, but to munch or crunch in a drawn-out fashion, as one would chew gum or eat a lollipop. By using this word Jesus says we must feed on him by faith continuously. Similarly, the same verse shows to “drink” Jesus’ blood is to satisfy spiritual thirst, meaning to trust in what Jesus’ blood spiritually accomplishes for believers, namely the atonement of sins. Jesus is explaining and expounding the message of the gospel in the language of OT worship.

III. The Will of God: Why did God the Father send his Son into the world?

A. Jesus will secure eternal resurrection life for all his Father has given to him (vv. 37-40)

The will of God is for the salvation of everyone who believes. Jesus is in complete agreement with the Father’s will. Jesus will not lose a single person who has been given to him by his Father. This is the doctrine of God’s active preservation to produce the perseverance of the saints. Everyone who looks to Jesus and believes in him will have eternal life. In other words, death cannot destroy the kind of life that Jesus gives.

B. Many will not believe in Jesus, and will grumble against him (vv. 36, 41-42, 52, 59)

1. Many in the crowds closed their hearts to Jesus and refused to believe in him as the Son of Man, sent from the Father in heaven as the Bread of Life. Many people “marveled” at Jesus during his ministry. But the only thing the Bible records Jesus “marveling” at is man’s unbelief (Mk 6:6)! The Father has not given those who persist in unbelief to the Son (the doctrines of election and predestination). That is what Jesus said!

2. This entire dialogue with the people was a synagogue sermon in Capernaum. As Jesus talked with Jewish unbelievers, we are reminded that religious people too can be blind to spiritual things. Christians would do well to see themselves in that synagogue listening to Jesus.

Conclusion – Do you see that “feeding on Jesus” is a personal and daily act of faith that requires hard work on your part? No one can eat or drink for you. In the same manner, no one can believe for you. The gospel is for the daily walk of Christians. Exercised daily, faith in Christ strengthens us, encourages us, nourishes us, refreshes us, and even now brings us into the mystical realm of eternal life. “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” if you believe in him by feeding on him. Come, all who are spiritually hungry, and feed on the only one who satisfies.