

John 6:16-40
Psalm 78
Psalm 78

“Bread from Heaven”

May 24, 2020

Read Psalm 78:1-17

Psalm 78 is one of the story-songs of the Psalms.

It’s not as long as the epic poems of Homer –
but then again, it was designed to be sung in public worship –
so it needed to be long enough to tell the story –
but short enough to fit into the liturgy!

In our day we don’t generally sing hymns with 27 stanzas.

Though, Nicolas von Zinzendorf once composed a hymn with 162 stanzas!!
And throughout Christian history, many poets have written long hymns.
The early Christian poet Aurelius Prudentius wrote several hymns of 20-40 stanzas
connecting the history of redemption to the life of the believer.

But since we are not used to singing 27 stanzas –
with these longer Psalms it can be helpful to intersperse singing and reading of stanzas.

Psalm 78 retells the story of the Exodus and Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness –
as an example to believers today –
“that the next generation might know” God’s mighty deeds –
that “children yet unborn” might “arise and tell them to their children,
so that they should set their hope in God,
and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.”

We’ll sing the next section – verses 18-37 (stanzas 8-14 in your hymnals) –
which is the section that speaks of how God provided bread from heaven –
“the bread of the angels” –
and yet in spite of all this, they continued to rebel.

Sing Psalm 78:18-37 (stanzas 8-14)
Read Psalm 78:38-55

In spite of all their rebellion – God was merciful and gracious.
They forgot him – but he remembered his covenant – and he gave them the land –
the inheritance that he had promised Abraham.

We’ll sing the last section – stanzas 22-27 –
which reflect on the period of the judges –
and especially the death of Eli and his sons

(when the ark was captured
and the sons of Eli were killed in battle by the Philistines)
But then God chose David to shepherd Israel, his inheritance.

Sing Psalm 78:56-72
Read John 6:1-40

John 6 has three interlocking points:

First, you must come to Jesus and believe in him as the Bread of Life.
Second, all those whom the Father has given Jesus *will come* to him.
And Third, those who continue to feed upon Christ will have eternal life,
and Jesus will raise him up at the last day.

This pattern is repeated several times in chapter 6
as Jesus unfolds different aspects of this.

But this is why we read and sang Psalm 78.

Yes, Jesus is the Christ – the Son of God – the prophet who was to come.
But there had been many prophets!
There had been many sons of David – many anointed kings!

What will be different this time?

In the backdrop is the catastrophic failure of Israel.

As you look back in your life – do you see catastrophic failures?
Maybe you've avoided "catastrophe" so far –
but still, when you hear the story of Israel,
it's really easy to see yourself there!

You've battled against sin and temptation –
you saw real victory and change –
only to crumble ... again...

What is going to be different this time?

This is why the three-fold message of John 6 is so important!

You must come to Jesus and believe in him as the Bread of Life.
But only God can save – and so *he* must call you and draw you to Jesus.
And then you must continue to feed on Christ if you wish to have eternal life.

Introduction: Why Are You Seeking Jesus? (v1-24)

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.

² *And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.*

³ *Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.* ⁴ *Now the Passover,*

the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii^[a] worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" ¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles,^[b] they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

²² On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³ Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

Jesus has just fed the 5,000.

With twelve baskets left over

(echoing the 12 tribes of Israel whom Moses fed in the wilderness)

the crowds believe that he is the Messiah--the Prophet who was to come.

This is a problem!

In fact, it's such a big problem that Jesus takes off into the mountains without waiting for his disciples!

Now, why is Jesus bothered by this?

Isn't it true?

Isn't Jesus the Messiah?

Isn't he the Prophet greater than Moses?

Then why does he run and hide?

You see, the people had misunderstood who the Messiah was.
They were expecting a political Messiah who would defeat Rome
and set up the Kingdom on Earth.
Jesus wants nothing to do with that, so he goes up the mountain alone.

His disciples, meanwhile, get into the boat and start across the Sea of Galilee
toward Capernaum.
As they cross the lake,
a violent storm hits.
As they are tossed by the waves, they see Jesus walking on the water toward them,
and they were afraid.

Why does John tell this story here?
John leaves out all sorts of things that the other gospels include;
and includes all sorts of things that the other gospels don't mention.
Jesus has just fed the 5,000
And in the rest of the chapter, he will explain what that means.
How do these verses (15-21) fit into the chapter?

Well, what does Jesus do?
Does he still the waves?
Does he speak to the wind?
Matthew and Mark tell us that he did.
But John doesn't say anything about that.
All John reports is that Jesus said "I am. Do not fear."
"It is I" is an okay translation so long as you realize that Jesus is saying--
"I AM"--the same thing that God had said to Moses at the Burning Bush.

You see, the people were confused.
They thought that Jesus was merely a prophet like Moses.

Jesus here tells his disciples,
no, I am not merely a prophet like Moses.
I am Yahweh.
I AM.

So after feeding the 5,000 and demonstrating to his disciples that He is God himself,
Jesus now is ready to explain these things to the crowds.

1. The Threefold Pattern (v25-27)

When the crowds come over to Capernaum seeking Jesus,
they ask "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

(In verse 59 we will that all of this conversation takes place in the synagogue at Capernaum).

Does Jesus answer their question?

No.

Jesus moves past the superficial question,
and addresses their hearts.

Verses 25-27 provide the basic statement of the pattern that will recur throughout Jesus' sermon:
Work for the food that endures to eternal life –
the food which the Son of Man will give you.

a. Labor for Food [Prioritize what Matters Most]

²⁵ *When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"* ²⁶ *Jesus answered 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."* ²⁷ *Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."*

What are you looking for?

What are you seeking?

What are you *working for*?

What are the things that matter most to you?

Your job? Your career? Your family?

All these things will perish.

Jesus says to work for the food that endures to eternal life.

b. Which the Son of Man Will Give to You [Only God Can Save]

But – Jesus adds – work for the food which the Son of Man will give to you.

That may seem odd.

Work for food that will be *given* to you.

If it's a gift – why do you have to work?

If you are working for it – how is it a gift?

This is what Jesus will be explaining throughout chapter 6.

c. That Endures to Eternal Life

But the key point that he introduces up front in verse 27 –
is that this food endures to eternal life.

Think back to chapter 4 – where Jesus told the Samaritan woman about the living water – the spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Jesus has already identified himself as the source of living water.

Now he says that he is also the source of the food that endures to eternal life.

After all, Jesus taught us in chapter 5 that the Father has given the Son to have life in himself. And that means that the Son has the power to give life to whom he will.

Here in verse 27 he adds, “for on him God the Father has set his seal.”

The seal in the ancient world functioned as the guarantee of authenticity.

The Son of Man – our Lord Jesus Christ – has the *seal* of the Father.

Think back to the baptism of Jesus in chapter 1.

God set his seal of approval on his Son –

when, at his baptism, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit.

This is part of why we refer to baptism as a sign *and seal*.

In the OT, circumcision was the *seal* of the righteousness which Abraham had by faith.

In the same way, in the NT,

baptism is the seal of the righteousness which *we* have by faith.

The whole point of a *seal* is that it is a visible sign that marks something or someone as belonging to another.

And the people understand *something* of what Jesus is saying – and so they ask in v28:

2. The Pattern Explained in Jesus (v28-35)

²⁸ *Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”*

This is a good question.

Jesus has just said that they should be working for the food that endures to eternal life!

And they – like the Samaritan woman in chapter 4 –

say, “hey we like this idea!

So, how do we get there?

What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”

a. The Work of God Is to Believe in Jesus (v29)

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

Everything starts with faith.

The work of God is to believe in him whom he has sent.

The work of God is to believe in Jesus.

The work of God is *not* “obey the Ten Commandments” –
or even, “Love God and love neighbor.”
And the work of God is not just generic “believe God.”

No, the work of God is very specifically,
“believe in him whom God has sent.”

At first, their response sounds absurd:

b. The True Bread from Heaven Is Jesus (v30-34)

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.’”*

Jesus has just fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves and two fishes.
And they are asking for signs?!!

But if you think about it,
Jesus is claiming to be someone *greater* than Moses.

Moses fed the entire nation of Israel for 40 years with manna in the wilderness –
“he gave the bread from heaven to eat.”

They quote Psalm 78 to Jesus.
They have learned the lesson of their fathers!

Moses fed the whole nation with bread from heaven for forty years!
Jesus has given them *one meal* – for five thousand people.

Compared to Moses, that’s a parlor trick!
If you are greater than Moses – show us something *greater than Moses!*

This feeding of the 5,000 was good,
but you've got a long way to go before you catch up to Moses!

This is why Jesus says, [v32-33]

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.”*

You've got it all wrong, Jesus says.
You are confusing earthly things with heavenly things.
The manna in the desert was not the true bread from heaven.
The manna in the desert was **a picture** of the bread from heaven.

The TRUE bread from heaven is not manna--but is he who comes down from heaven.

They think that they are tracking with Jesus!

They like what they are hearing!

After all, they can understand that earthly things point to heavenly things.

All Jews believed that.

So they say, okay Lord, give us this bread always!

³⁴ *They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."*

Just like the Samaritan woman – they *want* the living bread –
just like she wanted the living water!

But they are still thinking of bread...

So Jesus says:

c. Jesus Is the Bread of Life that Lasts Forever (v35)

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."*

There was once a debate over the question:

"Does eating equal faith."

Heinrich Bullinger – from Zurich – answered that eating is faith – and faith is eating.

John Calvin responded by saying – yes... but...

Yes, Jesus is the bread of life – and we partake of him *by faith*,

but that does not mean that eating becomes irrelevant!

No, we eat *by faith*.

The work of God is to believe in the one whom he has sent.

In the same way, the one who believes in Jesus comes to him – and never hungers again –
because *by faith* he partakes of the bread of life.

That's why John told us at the beginning of the chapter that the Passover was near.

Some people think that John 6 has nothing to do with the Lord's Supper –

and in one sense, plainly no one who heard Jesus that day

would have thought of the Lord's Supper!

(Since Jesus hadn't instituted it yet!).

But John is writing *for us*.

For those who *know* the rest of the story.

He wants us to see the connection.

God gave Israel manna in the wilderness

in order to show them that man does not live by bread alone

but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Dt 8:3).

And Jesus *is* the Word that comes from God.

He is the Word who was with God in the beginning – the Word who was God!

The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

In Revelation 7, John will show the consummation of this:

Speaking of the souls under the altar –

those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb – he says:

“never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst” (Rev. 7:16).

The crowd is looking for a sign greater than Moses –

greater than the manna in the wilderness.

What could possibly be greater than feeding an entire nation for a generation?!

How about feeding the whole of the new humanity for an eternity?!

3. The Pattern Applied to Us (v36-40)

And that’s why Jesus applies this to his hearers in verses 36-40.

He starts with a rebuke:

a. But You Have Not Believed (v36)

³⁶ *But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.*

There is nothing better than *seeing Jesus*.

God has come in the flesh.

The Word has become incarnate.

You have seen the “I am” – and yet you do not believe.

Such is humanity’s blindness – such is Israel’s blindness –

that when all of God’s promises were fulfilled, they still could not see.

Then again, only God can save!

And so Jesus continues:

b. All That the Father Gives Me Will Come to Me (v37)

³⁷ *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*

You can see here the basic outline of the doctrine of predestination:

“All that the Father gives me will come to me.”

Only God can save.

He is the one who calls us out of darkness into light.
And so the Father gives a people to the Son.

And those whom the Father gives to the Son
will indeed come in faith to Jesus.

And those who come in faith to Jesus,
Jesus will never cast out.

This is designed to assure you that if you come in faith to Jesus,
then Jesus will hold on to you forever!

As Jesus goes on to say (v38):

c. And I Will Raise Them Up on the Last Day (v38-40)

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.”*

Do you see Jesus?

I know.

Sometimes it is very hard to see clearly.
Sometimes the noise and the clamor around us can confuse our vision.

But this is the will of the Father:
that Jesus should lose *nothing* of all that the Father has given the Son.

Because the Father’s will is that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him
should have eternal life.

There are lots of echoes here from John 3.
“that whosoever believes in him, shall not perish but have eternal life.”

But here it becomes clear that the *reason* why they will not perish
is because first, the Father has drawn them –
and second, the Son has preserved them.

We’ll come later in John’s gospel to the work of the Holy Spirit –
here Jesus is focused on the relationship between the Father and the Son.
The Father elects.
The Son preserves.

You are called to *believe!*