

John 6:24-35

²⁴ So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

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, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for 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 for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”

²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” 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, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?”

³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which 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 will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

THERE WERE TWO RESTAURANTS LOCATED NEARBY EACH OTHER. AND SO THEY HAD COMPETING SIGNS TO INVITE CUSTOMERS INTO THEIR ESTABLISHMENT.

THE HEALTH FOOD RESTAURANT’S SIGN SAID: “EAT HERE AND LIVE A LONG LIFE.”

THE BARBECUE PLACE COUNTERED ITS COMPETITOR BY INVITING PEOPLE TO: “EAT HERE AND DIE HAPPY.”

CONTRARY TO WHAT IS BELIEVED BY SOME, JESUS DOES NOT ASK US TO CHOOSE BETWEEN ONE OR THE OTHER, WHEN IT COMES TO FOLLOWING HIM.

YES, JESUS OFFERS ETERNAL LIFE TO THOSE WHOM HE SAVES, BUT THIS DOES NOT MEAN ONE MUST GIVE UP ENJOYING HIS OR HER PRESENT LIFE.

IT IS TRUE WE MUST MAKE CHOICES BETWEEN THE WORLD’S ATTRACTIONS AND GOD’S WILL, BUT THERE IS A GREAT DEAL WE CAN DO TO HAVE FUN WHILE FOLLOWING THE LORD.

AND WHILE THE SAVIOR POINTED OUT THAT OUR CHIEF PRIORITY IS TO LOVE GOD, AND OTHERS AS OURSELVES, HE DID NOT DISCOUNT THE VERY REAL NEEDS OF EARTHLY LIFE.

HE NEVER SAID WE SHOULD IGNORE OUR PHYSICAL HUNGER OR THIRST OR OTHER NEEDS OF LIFE, BUT ONLY THAT WORLDLY CONCERNS SHOULD LEAD US TOWARDS GOD, NOT AWAY FROM GOD.

THUS HE CONTINUED TO CALL PEOPLE TO FAITH IN GOD AS THEY LIVED OUT THEIR LIVES.

WITH THIS IN MIND LET US TURN TO TODAY’S GOSPEL READING, WHICH OPENS THE DAY AFTER JESUS’ MIRACULOUS FEEDING OF 5000 PEOPLE.

IN JOHN’S GOSPEL THIS MIRACLE, OR SIGN, LED MANY IN THE CROWD TO WANT TO MAKE JESUS A KING.

THE SAVIOR HOWEVER HAD NO INTEREST IN A WORLDLY KINGDOM- AND SO HE SLIPPED AWAY INTO THE WILDERNESS BEFORE THE CROWD COULD CORNER HIM.

HIS DISCIPLES SET OUT TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEA- AND IN THE DARKNESS WERE FRIGHTENED BY SEEING JESUS WALK TOWARDS THEM ON THE WATER.

THEN, THE NEXT MORNING THE CROWD, WHO NATURALLY WAS HUNGRY AGAIN, SEARCHED FOR JESUS.

MANY OF THEM LOOKED ALL OVER THE AREA, AND THEN SEEING A BOAT WAS MISSING- SURMISED HE AND THE TWELVE HAD GONE TO CAPERNAUM.

THE PEOPLE THEN PILED INTO OTHER BOATS, TO CROSS THE SEA OF GALILEE, AND AFTER GOING ASHORE THEY SEARCHED SOME MORE- UNTIL THEY FOUND JESUS.

NOTICE, THEY SPENT A GREAT DEAL OF TIME AND EFFORT TO FOLLOW AFTER HIM.

CONSEQUENTLY, WE MIGHT THINK JESUS WOULD BE PLEASED BY THEIR DILIGENCE, AND YET HE WAS NOT.

INDEED AFTER ASKING HIM HOW HE CAME TO BE WHERE HE WAS-THE SAVIOR ANSWERED BY MILDLY SCOLDING THEM FOR PURSUING THE WRONG GOAL.

HE SAID: "... YOU ARE LOOKING FOR ME NOT BECAUSE YOU SAW MIRACULOUS SIGNS, BUT BECAUSE YOU ATE YOUR FILL."

BY THAT STATEMENT JESUS SHOWS HE KNEW THEY ARE MERELY AFTER ANOTHER FREE MEAL, RATHER THAN THE LASTING FOOD FROM GOD HE HAD TO OFFER.

AND, WE CAN SURMISE, IT WAS NOT AS IF THESE PEOPLE HAD NO MEANS TO GET FOOD ON THEIR OWN.

SURELY MOST OF THEM HAD HOMES TO GO TO AND LABOR TO DO TO SECURE THE FOOD THEY NEEDED, BUT INSTEAD THEY PURSUED JESUS TO GET ANOTHER MEAL FROM HIM.

THUS, THEY SOUGHT OUT JESUS THE NEXT DAY, NOT TO LEARN FROM HIM-OR PERSONALLY SEEK TO KNOW HIM, BUT TO GET MORE FOOD.

ANOTHER PREACHER EXPLAINS THE SITUATION IN THIS WAY:

"MIRACLES ATTRACTED CROWDS AND APPLAUSE, BUT THEIR SOUL HUNGER WOULD NOT BE SATISFIED UNLESS THEY HAD A PERSONAL CONNECTION TO GOD."

THIS IS WHERE THE PEOPLE GOT THEIR PRIORITIES MIXED UP- JESUS OFFERED WHAT WE COULD CALL THE ETERNAL GOURMET FOOD OF A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

HOWEVER THE PEOPLE WERE MORE INTERESTED IN THE TRANSITORY JUNK FOOD OF EARTHLY LIFE THAN THEY WERE IN THE HEALTHY FOOD JESUS OFFERED.

YOU SEE, THE MIRACLE OF THE FEEDING OF THE 5000, WHILE MEETING THE PHYSICAL HUNGER OF THE CROWD, WAS ALSO MEANT TO POINT THEM TOWARDS FINDING SATISFACTION FOR THEIR SPIRITUAL HUNGER.

SADLY, THOSE WHO PURSUED JESUS THE NEXT DAY LOOKED ONLY FOR THE TEMPORARY SATISFACTION OF ANOTHER FREE MEAL, INSTEAD OF THE LASTING LIFE HE COULD PROVIDE.

THIS IS NOT UNLIKE HOW CHRISTIANS SOMETIMES FOCUS ALL ATTENTION AND EFFORTS ON THE "LITTLE" GIFTS OF GRACE, MEANING THE VARIOUS BLESSINGS WE RECEIVE FROM GOD.

WHILE SUCH GIFTS ARE HELPFUL IN THIS LIFE, THEY ARE ALSO MEANT TO DIRECT OUR ATTENTION TOWARDS THE GREATER AND LASTING GRACE OF SALVATION THROUGH GOD'S SON.

FOR EXAMPLE: HAVING HOPES AND DREAMS, ALONG WITH THE CAPACITY TO PURSE THEM IS ONE OF THOSE GIFTS.

THE POINT JESUS WAS MAKING IS THAT IF WE PURSUE ONLY THE GIFT AND NOT ALSO THE GIVER, EVEN IF WE GAIN WHAT WE DESIRE, WE WILL LOSE OUT IN THE END.

ST. AUGUSTINE IS REPORTED TO HAVE PUT IT THIS WAY: "THERE IS A GOD-SHAPED HOLE IN THE HUMAN HEART THAT ONLY GOD CAN FILL."

THIS IS WHAT FRUSTRATED AND DISAPPOINTED JESUS CONCERNING THE CROWD WHO PURSUED HIM WITH THE LESSER RATHER THAN THE GREATER GOAL IN MIND.

JESUS WANTED THEM TO FILL THAT GOD-SHAPED HOLE IN THEIR HEARTS. AND HIS DESIRE IS FOR US TO DO THE SAME.

UNFORTUNATELY, MUCH LIKE THE CROWD, EVEN CHRISTIANS SOMETIMES SETTLE FOR THE GOOD NEWS OF EARTHLY BLESSINGS, WHILE OVERLOOKING THE BETTER NEWS OF SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS.

THE CHALLENGE JESUS ISSUES TO US TODAY CAN BE FOUND BY TURNING OUR ATTENTION TO WHEN WE SING THE DOXOLOGY IN WORSHIP: "PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW."

THE QUESTION WE SHOULD ASK OURSELVES IS: HOW OFTEN DO I THINK OF THE BLESSING OF REDEMPTION THROUGH CHRIST, OVER AND ABOVE TRANSITORY BLESSINGS?

SADLY PEOPLE TEND TO FOCUS ON THE FIRST THING THAT CATCHES OUR ATTENTION, THE THING WE ARE MOST FAMILIAR WITH, OR WHAT CONCERNS OUR PRESENT NEEDS AND WANTS.

AND AS A RESULT OF THIS, WE SOMETIMES MISS OUT ON WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT SIMPLY BECAUSE WE ARE NOT LOOKING FOR MORE THAN AN ORDINARY MESSAGE OR EXPERIENCE.

FOR EXAMPLE: ORVILLE AND WILBER WRIGHT HAVE GONE DOWN IN HISTORY FOR PRODUCING THE FIRST AIRPLANE, TO MAKE A SUCCESSFUL "MANNED" FLIGHT.

AFTER THEY ACCOMPLISHED THE TASK, THE BROTHERS SENT A TELEGRAM TO THEIR SISTER KATHERINE IN OHIO, TO ANNOUNCE THEIR SUCCESS.

BY NATURE THE TELEGRAM'S CONTENT WAS VERY SHORT, WHICH EXPLAINS THE BREVITY OF THE WRIGHT BROTHER'S MESSAGE, IT SIMPLY SAID:

"WE HAVE ACTUALLY FLOWN 120 FT-WILL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS."

KATHERINE EXCITEDLY SHOWED THE TELEGRAM TO A FAMILY FRIEND, WHO ALSO WAS THE EDITOR OF A LOCAL NEWSPAPER.

THE MAN READ THE MESSAGE-BUT DIDN'T REALLY SEE WHAT IT SAID, FOR HE RESPONDED: "HOW NICE, THE BOYS WILL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS!"

YOU SEE, HE SAW THE WORD "CHRISTMAS" AND ASSUMED THAT WAS WHAT KATHERINE WAS EXCITED ABOUT, THUS HE MISSED THE EXTRAORDINARY NEWS ABOUT THE FLIGHT.

THIS IS SIMILAR TO THE CROWD'S REACTION TO JESUS AND HIS MIRACLE OF PROVIDING FOOD TO EAT.

THEY TOO LATCHED ONTO THE GOOD NEWS THAT JESUS COULD FEED THEIR BODIES, AND SO THEY MISSED HIS GREATER OFFERING OF ETERNAL LIFE.

INDEED, EVEN AFTER FINDING HIM AND SPEAKING WITH HIM, THE CROWD SIMPLY DID NOT HEAR WHAT JESUS SAID.

HE SPOKE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIORITIES, SAYING RATHER THAN WORKING ONLY FOR DAILY BREAD, THEY SHOULD STRIVE FOR THE BREAD GOD SENT FROM HEAVEN.

THE PEOPLE THEN ASKED HOW THEY COULD GET THAT BREAD, BUT WHEN JESUS ANSWERED- BY HAVING FAITH IN HIM, THEY DEMANDED MORE EVIDENCE IN ORDER TO BELIEVE.

THE PEOPLE EVEN BROUGHT UP MOSES, THE ONE, WHO IN THEIR MINDS, SHAPED THE HEBREW PEOPLE INTO GOD'S CHOSEN RACE AND NATION.

CHRISTIANS, IT SEEMS, OFTEN FOCUS ON MIRACLE OF THE PARTING OF THE RED SEA WHEN WE THINK ABOUT THE WONDERS GOD DID THROUGH MOSES.

BUT FOR THE JEWS- THE PROVISION OF MANNA IN THE WILDERNESS HAD A MORE PROFOUND IMPACT.

SO PERHAPS SOME IN THE CROWD WERE LOOKING FOR JESUS TO RAIN DOWN DAILY BREAD FROM HEAVEN TO SHOW HE WAS THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

BUT JESUS TOLD THEM THEY DID NOT HAVE THEIR FACTS STRAIGHT.

HE REMINDED THEM OF THE IMPORTANT FACT THAT THE MANNA WAS NOT PROVIDED BY MOSES, RATHER WAS SENT BY GOD.

JESUS THEN TAUGHT THAT THE TRUE BREAD FROM HEAVEN THAT GIVES LIFE, WHICH THE MANNA ONLY WAS A SIGN OF, IS THE ONE GOD SENT DOWN FROM HEAVEN TO THE EARTH.

NATURALLY THE PEOPLE SAID- "OKAY-GIVE US THAT BREAD", AND JESUS RESPONDED:

"I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. WHOEVER COMES TO ME WILL NEVER BE HUNGRY, AND WHOSE BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER BE THIRSTY."

WITH THESE WORDS JESUS PROCLAIMED GOD'S INTENTION TO REDEEM HIS PEOPLE, AND AS WE KNOW, ALL PEOPLES, THROUGH HIM.

BUT UNLIKE MOSES, JESUS WAS SENT NOT TO LEAD US TO A PROMISED LAND IN THIS WORLD.

HIS PURPOSE WAS TO FULFILL GOD'S GREATER PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD FOR ALL WHO RECEIVE LASTING BREAD FROM HEAVEN.

THIS, IN FACT, IS THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE GOSPELS, AND EVEN MORE SO IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

THE FOURTH GOSPEL'S PARTICULAR FOCUS CONCERNING JESUS IS THREE-FOLD: WHO JESUS IS, WHERE HE CAME FROM, AND WHY HE CAME TO EARTH.

THUS, THE PURPOSE OF THE MIRACLES HE DID WAS NOT ONLY TO MEET HUMAN NEEDS.

INSTEAD JESUS' WORDS AND ACTIONS, AND ESPECIALLY HIS MIRACLES, ALSO TO POINT US TOWARDS HIM, AS THE ONE SENT FROM THE FATHER, TO HEAL OUR SPIRITUAL BROKENNESS, AND NOURISH OUR SOULS.

THIS IS ONE REASON WHY WE ALL NEED TO BE REMINDED FROM TIME TO TIME, TO KEEP OUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT.

INDEED, ONE OF THE LESSONS WE CAN TAKE FROM THE GOSPEL READING IS TO LOOK HONESTLY AT HOW OUR ACTIONS REVEAL WHERE OUR REAL PRIORITIES ARE.

DO WE SPEND MORE TIME AND EFFORT ON PURSUING WORLDLY HOPES, DREAMS, AND OTHER DESIRES- THAN WE DO ON BETTER KNOWING AND SERVING JESUS?

YES, THE FIRST IS IMPORTANT, WE ALL WANT, AND DESERVE, TO HAVE A GOOD LIFE ON EARTH.

BUT JESUS, WHEN HE SAID: "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE", WAS AND STILL IS, OFFERING SO MUCH MORE THAN WHAT WE CAN GET HERE AND NOW.

TRULY, THE SAVIOR CAME NOT JUST TO AFFIRM GOD'S INTENTION TO BLESS OUR PRESENT-EARTHLY LIVES, BUT EVEN MORE SO CAME TO DIRECT US TOWARD THE LASTING JOY OF ETERNAL LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

THEREFORE, WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES NEGLECTING THE GREATER GIFT JESUS OFFERS, IT IS TIME TO WORK ON RECLAIMING HIM AS THE BREAD OF LIFE, THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN.

A MAN NAMED ROBERT CAPON SUMMARIZED THE MEANING OF JESUS' MISSION WRITING:

"THE MESSIAH WAS NOT GOING TO SAVE THE WORLD BY MIRACLES, BAND-AID INTERVENTIONS, A STORM CALMED SEA, A CROWD FED...RATHER HUMANITY WOULD BE SAVED BY THE MYSTERY OF HIS PERFECT SACRIFICE ON A ...CROSS."

THIS IS WHY JESUS INVITES US TO MAKE PURSING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM A PRIORITY IN OUR LIVES, FOR HE ALONE CAN FILL THE GOD-SHAPED HOLE IN OUR HEART.

LET US PRAY: GOD OF FORGIVENESS AND NEW BEGINNINGS, YOU FEED OUR HEARTS WITH COMPASSION, AND NOURISH OUR SOULS WITH THE BREAD OF HEAVEN. AS JESUS FED THE HUNGRY CROWDS, KNOWING THAT THEY NEEDED BOTH PHYSICAL BREAD AND THE BREAD OF HEAVEN, FILL US WITH YOUR SPIRIT SO AS TO MAKE US ONE WITH YOUR SON, WHOM YOU SENT TO FILL THE VOID WITHIN OUR HEARTS. AMEN.

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