

## John 6:28-51

### Lessons Arising from a Heated Discussion

*The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven.— v. 41.*

When the Jews asked Christ for a sign, they showed that even though Christ had most recently performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000 that wasn't enough for them. Their fathers, after all, had been supernaturally fed every day when they were in the wilderness centuries ago. Could Christ match that? *What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?* They had just seen a sign. They had participated in something that no one had ever seen or experienced. Christ had taken 5 loaves and few fishes and multiplied them and distributed the bread to the multitude and now they were craving for something even more spectacular. Unbelief sure runs deep in the depraved souls of sinners.

And when the Lord Jesus identified Himself as the living bread which came down from heaven, we're told that the Jews *murmured at him*. I think you could say that v. 41 marks a point in this chapter when the dialogue begins to heat up. The word *murmur* means literally *to grumble against in a low tone*. What a vivid word. It's not hard to picture the people in that crowd looking at each other in astonishment and muttering under their breath expressions of skepticism and contempt. That's the word a number of modern translations utilize – *to grumble*. One modern version captures the growing intensity perhaps a little more succinctly by translating it this way: *Now the Jews said bitter things about Jesus because of his words, I am the bread which came down from heaven.*

What their grumbling indicated, of course, is what Christ Himself pointed out about them – they didn't believe in Him. Verse 36: *But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not.* They didn't even view Him as being above ordinary. Listen to the words of v. 42 *And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?*

Now usually when discussions heat up, they don't accomplish much. That's one of things I don't like even about conservative news networks. You find interviews with people of a different viewpoint from the one conducting the interview and what usually happens is both parties just get louder and talk past each other. It must help the news network's ratings for it seems like they do a whole lot of it.

When Christ, however, engages in a discussion that becomes heated, it is nonetheless very important that Christians pay particular attention to the words He speaks. And don't misunderstand me when I describe this discussion between Christ and His adversaries. I'm not suggesting for a moment that Christ lost His composure in the course of these discussions. It's interesting to note, isn't it, that you never find an instance of Christ murmuring with His disciples about the unbelief of His hearers.

Christ certainly utilized the full use of His emotions in the course of His discussions. I think, for example, of the woes He pronounced against the Scribes and Pharisees in Mt 23:13 *But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in [yourselves], neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.* And in the verses that follow He pronounces more woes upon the Scribes and Pharisees. It's hard to picture Christ announcing those woes without a great deal of passion and righteous anger in His words.

The point I'm making now, however, is that even when His discussions became heated with His adversaries, He never lost control of Himself. He never uttered an ill-advised or ill-spoken word. He was always in perfect control of Himself. I once heard a Bible professor give advice to parents when it came to dealing with their children say to them – *make sure you never lose your temper but do feel free to use your temper* – i.e. there are times when there is a place for your children to know that you're grieved or even angry but make sure that you never get swallowed up in your anger to the point that you've lost control of yourself.

Christ never lost His temper but I think there are instances when He did use His temper. So we find this discussion between Christ and the Jews becoming increasingly heated and Christ's tactic, if you will, is not so much to shout at them as it is to speak spiritually to them. And that's what He does when He makes reference to eating His flesh and drinking His blood. He's speaking spiritually. He flat out says this to His disciples in v. 63 *the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

So let's tune in to this discussion between Christ and the Jews by asking a simple question: What lessons can we learn from a heated discussion between Christ and the Jews? This is what I want to focus on this morning:

## Lessons Arising From a Heated Discussion

The first lesson I'd call your attention to pertains to:

### I. The Nutritional Value of Living Bread

When Christ pointed out to the Jews that it wasn't Moses that gave them the manna that descended upon them 6 days a week during their wilderness wanderings, He didn't correct their mistaken notion by saying it was God Himself that provided that manna. What He said, rather, was that God at that moment in which they now found themselves had sent to them the true bread from heaven. Look at v. 32: *Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.*

The Jews, unfortunately, couldn't think beyond the bread that had been provided by Christ in the feeding of the 5,000, so thinking still in terms of that kind of bread, they appear to be interested when they say in v. 34 *Lord, evermore give us this bread.* And in

reply to their request Christ begins what will be a noted series of *I am* statements that are found in the gospel of John.

The very first in the series of these statements is what we find in v. 35 – *I am the bread of life*. What follows shows what I'm now calling the nutritional value of this bread. Look at it again: *I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*

Christ is speaking of course of the deep and lasting soul satisfaction that comes through believing in Him. It's the kind of satisfaction that is expressed a number of times by the Psalmist. So in Ps 107:9 we read *For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness*. It's the same thing expressed in what is perhaps the best known Psalm in all the Bible, the Shepherd's Psalm where we read in Ps. 23:5 *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over*. This overflowing cup is the emblem of a soul who has found in Christ his all in all.

Now when Christ says *I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst;* This is an aspect of the gospel that refers to the here and now. Christ is speaking with regard to the believer's present experience. We know, of course, that the gospel sees way beyond this here and now of this present evil world. Did you notice in the reading of the portion of this chapter how often Christ actually looks ahead to that life to come?

Joh 6:39 *And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.*

Joh 6:40 *And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Joh 6:40 *And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Joh 6:54 *Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

So there certainly is an emphasis in this discourse on having eternal life now and in being raised up at the last day. And I know that I've pointed out on different occasions how that if your focus in your religion is exclusively on the here and now, then your religion is failing you and failing you badly. Call to mind Paul's words to the Corinthians in 1Co 15:19 *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

So there can be no doubt that the gospel sees beyond this world. But just as it would be a mistake to think that the gospel only equips us for the here and now, it would be an equally grave mistake to think that the gospel only focuses on heaven and on the life to come at a future time and has little or nothing to do with how we live and enjoy God and Christ during our days in this world.

I think it would be correct to say that the two things work together. The matter of knowing that you can look ahead to everlasting life ministers very present blessings to your soul and impacts how you live and what you experience even in this present evil world. And it is while we're here in this world, with all its challenges and afflictions and setbacks and disappointments and even tragedies and sins and failures that you can nevertheless know the satisfaction of Christ, the true and living bread. That's the nutritional value of this bread, you see.

That satisfaction, you see, springs from a peace that passes all understanding and from a joy that is described as unspeakable and full of glory. Think about that for a moment. Peace in this world is fleeting at best and is based on smooth sailing through life. And very often those that appear to have much in this world still don't find satisfaction in the depth of their souls. You were created, you see, with a heart capacity for peace and joy and satisfaction that all the toys and trinkets and vices and sinful pleasures in this world could never satisfy.

You were created for God. And when men lost God they lost the very source of peace and joy and life. And whatever they manage to find in the temporal pleasures of this world cannot offset the sense of guilt that abides within on account of sin. But now in Christ Jesus those blessings can be known now and they can be enjoyed now. And if you know that you're sins are forgiven and you understand the basis of that forgiveness in the life and death of Christ and you know that you're accepted with God through Christ and you know to what lengths Christ would go to purchase you to Himself then it really doesn't matter what else you have or don't have in this world, you find yourself blissfully satisfied with Christ to the point that you don't need anything else. He's more than sufficient for the longing of your soul.

I make this a regular point of emphasis when I preach at the Wheeler each month. (I was there this past Friday). I don't know what else those men hear in the course of their time at Wheeler, but it's not hard to detect in many of them a kind of skepticism that says something like – "I tried religion, or I tried the gospel, or I tried coming to Jesus Christ and it didn't do me any good at all. I'm still separated from my family; I still don't have a job or a place to live; I still struggle with health issues and with countless heartbreaks."

And so I try to make it a point of emphasis in my times there that I haven't come there to offer them anything in terms of what they may gain in this world. I'm not about to tell you that if you accept what I have to offer you in the gospel then the external circumstances in your lives will so change that you'll gain health and wealth and you'll be able to patch up all the broken relationships that your sins have created.

What I do tell them and I tell you here, now, the same thing, that is if you see yourself as a sinner and you come to see Christ as the Savior of sinners then you'll gain such peace and such joy and such soul satisfaction in knowing that God accepts you and Christ accepts you that your circumstances in life will never be able to rob you of that joy or peace. That's what makes our peace a peace that passes all understanding. It's the joy of

sins forgiven; it's the prospect of everlasting life and it's the assurance that since Christ has condescended so low as to become a man and go all the way to Calvary's cross to redeem you. And if Christ has indeed come and lived and died and risen again then nothing – nothing – nothing will ever separate you from the love of Christ.

*For I am persuaded, Paul writes in Rom. 8:38,39 that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

This is the nutritional value, then, of Christ, the true and living bread. And the way we keep up the nutrition of our souls, so to speak, is to feed on Christ, which means to walk with Him and to commune with Him and to constantly through prayer and time in the word minister the gospel to our own hearts.

*For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world – v. 33.*

*I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst – v. 35.*

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life – vv. 47,48.*

*I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world – v. 51.*

Christ, then, speaks of the experiential blessings of the believer for right now and how those blessings are assured even to the end of time and beyond. But let's move on now to consider the next lesson that springs from Christ's heated discussion with the Jews. We've seen the nutritional value of the true and living bread, let's think next on the lesson of:

## II. The Complete Success of the Sovereign Savior

Verse 37 is a verse that marks that success when Jesus says *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me*. Do you see how this verse brings us face to face, as it were, with the doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption?

Here we're told by Christ Himself that His Father gave Him a people. That's not a notion, then, is it, that was invented by John Calvin or by any of the Reformers or Puritans. That's a statement that comes directly from Christ Himself. His Father gave Him a people. Now it's not hard to see how such a statement would stoke the already increasing anger of the Jews that Christ was addressing.

They thought, after all, that they were the chosen people of God. A little later in John's gospel they flaunt that very thing toward Christ when they choose to insult Him and assert their own mistaken identity. *Abraham is our father*, they'll insist in 8:39. And while Christ won't deny that they are the physical descendents of Abraham, He'll nevertheless confront

them with the truth that their spiritual father was none other than the devil himself. *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it* (Jn. 8:44).

This, perhaps as much as anything, provoked the anger of Christ's adversaries. The idea, not only that God had given a people to His Son but the idea that they were not a part of that people. Such words coming from the Son of God would be one of a number of contributing factors to their turning away from Christ. Look at the words of v. 66 *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

There's tremendous irony in that statement when you think about it. By their going back and walking no more with Christ, they proved the truth of what He had been saying. They proved that in spite of all they had seen of Christ and all they heard from Christ, they did not belong to Christ and wanted nothing to do with Christ.

Now it can't be denied that there is something that is initially humbling and therefore disturbing when a man reads such words in the gospel of John. What this statement in v. 37 means, you see, is that salvation is all of God. It's all of God the Father in the planning of it and in the giving a people to Christ. It's all of God the Son in the execution of it, and Christ would be the One to execute it by paying a very high price, even the price of His blood being shed from Calvary's cross. And it's all of God the Spirit in the application of it. This is revealed to us in the first part of v. 44 *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.* The Holy Spirit is, of course, the Spirit of the Father. He's the One that convicts of sin, and convinces of Christ. You find that vividly illustrated on the Day of Pentecost when Peter preached Christ and the Holy Spirit moved on hearts.

Now the thing that makes this truth at first humbling and disturbing is that it means that if salvation is all of God and none of me then how can I know whether or not I'm one of those people that are given by God the Father to His Son? And this is one of the things that I love about this chapter in John's gospel is that it shows you with perfect clarity how you can know whether or not you're one of the chosen.

Again the words of v. 44 *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.* Which way are you going in your life? Do you find yourself drawn to Christ? Or do you find yourself a part of that crowd described in v. 66 *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.* That number was beyond all doubt the majority. So much so that Christ said to the twelve in v. 67 *Will ye also go away?*

It's as if He's saying to them – everyone else has left, are you going to leave too? And Peter's response to Christ shows clearly how you can tell who the ones are that the Father gave to the Son. You hear what Peter says in v. 68: *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

There's the key to who's chosen of God and who's not. Do you find in Christ the words of eternal life? Do you believe in Him? I'm not now asking you whether or not you harbor

doubts about yourself – it's not hard at all to harbor doubts about ourselves but the more determining question is whether or not you harbor doubts about who Christ is. And in Peter's case who in this instance was speaking for the disciples says to Christ – *we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God*. Oh here is a good confession of faith. Peter and the disciples (all but one of them) heard from Christ the words of eternal life and saw in Christ that He was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And how does this enter into the picture of God's choosing? How does this distinguish the ones that the Father gave to His Son from the ones who were not given to His Son? Christ Himself answers in the next verse – v. 70 *Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?* You can make the application to your own life now. Have you come to Christ? Do you believe in Him? Do you hear His words as the words of eternal life? If you can affirm those things then it's as if you can hear Christ saying to you personally and directly – *Have not I chosen you?*

And what these statements by Christ indicate to us is that He wins. His cause triumphs. His gospel in the end prevails. It doesn't matter that to the eye of the flesh it might appear as if He had failed. It did appear that way. This crowd that up to this point in Christ's ministry had been growing by leaps and bounds was all of a sudden reduced to practically nothing. From growing multitudes all the way down to the twelve.

Christ wins even when it doesn't look like it. We know, of course, that the time would come when the appearance of things would look even more like Christ had lost and His cause had failed. You know, I'm sure, what I'm referring to. I'm speaking of the time when He would die on Calvary's cross and His body would be taken down and placed in a tomb. It certainly looked then, even more so than in John 6 that Christ had lost. But He hadn't. He had won and He'd prove it by coming out of the grave and ascending into heaven.

And His disciples as well as multitudes to follow in succeeding generations would indeed find Him to be the bread of life and would feed on Him and would glorify and enjoy Him. Is He the source of your joy? Is He your provider of life? Do you live for Him? Do you trust in Him and believe in Him? Is that why you're here this morning – to worship Him because you believe in Him? If that is the case with you then you should hear His word as spoken to you – *Have not I chosen you?*

So we have the lesson of the nutritional value of the true and living bread. And we have the lesson of the success of the sovereign Savior. I'll only take time to mention briefly the lesson of:

### III. The Open Invitation of the Glorious Gospel of Salvation

Many Christians resort to John 6:37 to affirm not only the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation but to also affirm the openness of that invitation to come to Christ. Look at v. 37

again and focus now on the second part of the verse: *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

What precious words are these that come especially to souls that may be troubled about their assurance of salvation. *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* That was true of that Jewish crowd that left Him. Had any of them but come to Christ, He would not have cast them out. It's just as true today as it was then. And what these words teach us, therefore, is that the arms of Christ are open wide to receive any and all who will come to Him.

I love the way this is pictured by Isaiah, who Paul quotes in Rom. 10:20,21 *But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.*

Listen to the words of Isaiah that Paul draws from. They're found in Isaiah 65:1,2 *I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name. 2 I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts.*

There are, you know, unsaved sinners who actually take heart in the doctrine of God's sovereign election. They think that it lets them off the hook. They think that the ultimate cause of their rejection of Christ is to be blamed on God Himself. These verses spoken by God Himself through Isaiah and then quoted by Paul in Romans portray a different picture altogether. Add to that picture the promise that Christ gives in our text and what you have is the truth of God and Christ's willingness to receive any and all who will come to Him. His hands are stretched out wide in open invitation. So there is no place for the Christ-rejecter to blame God for his failure to come to Christ.

The issue of who's chosen and who's not isn't anything that a sinner needs to worry about. Your immediate concern needs to be with the promise of Christ to receive all who will come to Him. Your concern needs to be with the stretched out hands of open invitation that Christ Himself extends to you.

Will you come to Him? Will you feed on Christ? Will you avail yourself of His promise and find in Him the words of eternal life? Oh may the Lord Himself impress upon us all, then, these very important and glorious lessons that spring from a heated discussion with the Jews.