

Red Letters | The Sermons of Jesus (2024)

I Am the Bread of Life (II)

John 6.14-15, 24-40

March 3, 2024

Therefore, the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." ⁴² They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" ⁴³ Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ "It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. ⁴⁶ "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ "I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

⁵² Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."

⁵⁹ These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" ⁶¹ But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? ⁶² "What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? ⁶³ "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. ⁶⁴ "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. ⁶⁵ And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

⁶⁶ As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" ⁷¹ Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.

This is our second look at this "Bread of Life Discourse" and today we consider it as the trigger in what scholars call *The Galilean Crisis*. The words of Jesus in conversation with religious people, here, in a place of worship in Galilee, these words incite a crisis, a kind of fork-in-the-road moment. The

conversation ends with a crowd divided: (v. 66) *“As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and no longer walked with Him.”*

This is what Thomas Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*; 1962) called *“a paradigm shift”* and those who don't make the shift and change their ingrained ideas – those who won't undergo this crucial revolution will not be happy with Jesus (and will NOT be happy with happiness itself) and many walk away.

This crisis moment becomes an opportunity for US to examine some of our own core assumptions ... Are we open to seeing our cognitive bias, our conventional “wisdom” and our baseless assumptions? ... Are we willing to have Jesus Christ change our thinking to liberate us ... OR will we grumble and be scandalized by His words and therefore STUCK?

Let's look at:

- 1) Prevailing Assumptions (GRUMBLE)**
- 2) Counter-intuitive Change (STUMBLE)**
- 3) Implementing the Alternative (HUMBLE)**

When people come to Jesus Christ, everyone finds that at certain points his/her fundamental assumptions are now fundamentally challenged.

Certain ideas were SO basic for them, ... so unassailable and fixed that they couldn't possibly be refuted. They were like universal absolutes. And, of course, we too have notions about our own outlook and customs and approaches to life that we just accept because *“it's just how we roll”*.

We drive in the right lane – even though in England and its territories they drive in the other lane the... uh ... um ... wrong lane.

Often, we don't even know we have these assumptions. It's like the old joke about asking fish how they like the water and they answer, *“What's water?”* When you live in something, you don't question it and mostly you don't even see it or think about it at all. We usually can't hear our own accent ... *“What, ME? I don't have an ACCENT!”*

AND some of our prevailing assumptions are due NOT ONLY to our cultural orientation as modern South Floridians or Americans or Westerners but ... because we're human ... and we're FALLEN.

And in THEIR fallen, lifeless thinking (v. 53) ONE of the things they assumed ... which, basically, ALL fallen people still ASSUME is that *God helps those who help themselves*. All religions have some variety of this, some basic trust in Karma, or the Tao or the Law or the principle of *“sowing and reaping*”*, *“for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction”* (*Newton's Third Law of Motion*), *“what goes around comes around”*, *quid pro quo* (*“this for that”*), good people get blessed and bad people get sick or get cursed.

It's up to us to work the program and climb the ladder ... and produce. If you help yourself, if you do your very best, then you qualify for God's assistance, if you don't help yourself, don't expect God to do it for you. It's how we function at work ... in buying and selling, in physics and ... with God. The NT sometimes refers to this mindset as the "*elemental principles of this age*" (Gal 4.3,9: Col 2.8, 20) – it's the way things work "*under the sun*" (Ecclesiastes).

And these people (actually, ALL people) believed these things about God and spiritual life and ethical life ... and happiness ... AND about why we need a Messiah or a Christ, i.e., so He could judge the bad people and reward the good people (like us!) and could teach us good people how to be ... you know ... a little better ... give us a tweak/fine-tuning!

I wonder how many people believe that about the Church, that THIS is the basic teaching of Christianity. How many people in your life (maybe some sitting in the sanctuary today!) how many people believe that Jesus Christ came to teach good people how to get to heaven, how to help themselves ... because God helps those who help themselves!

So ...on that day... after feeding the 5000 ... and when they came looking for bread on that day, there was a crisis. The words of Jesus turned sharply against their assumptions, and everyone had to make a decision (Joel 3.14).

Jesus Christ not only exposed their mindset and challenged their most basic assumptions ... He turned it all upside-down. He offered this counterintuitive alternative to all religion and all karma and all spiritual/moral/self-help programs. The Bread from Heaven comes DOWN and gives life to the dead – those who CAN'T help themselves!

Look at FIVE COUNTER-INTUITIVE features in Jesus Christ's paradigm shift (the way of grace over karma):

First, Counterintuitive ORIGINS. His is not a program that originates with us and then works up to heaven ... or achieves happiness ... or attains a reward for those who are extra disciplined and diligent. His plan does not go from earth to heaven but from heaven to earth. This is food which "comes DOWN from above." This is God coming down to US. "*I am the bread that came DOWN out of heaven*". Counterintuitive ORIGINS.

Second, Counterintuitive ACCESS: "*no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him ... as it is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God'*" ... We CAN'T learn or study our way or bribe/buy into it ... It's NOT a matter of education or intelligence ... or salesmanship. It's an internal liberation that only God the Father can generate.

The prophets call it a "*new heart*" like Jeremiah CH 31: "*They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them*" (v. 34).

It's not like religion where we're afraid to be judged and we desperately want the church or mosque or synagogue or Kingdom Hall to approve of us, so we try really hard. External incentives and pressure keep worshipers on the straight and narrow. Grace is an internal liberation; God sets the heart free to know Him.

And Jesus Christ says over and over again that the LIBERATED HEART, drawn by God is the heart that is feeding on this food from above ... and the process of eating this food ... He calls believing... "He who Believes... Believe... Believes." A counterintuitive way of ACCESS – not the smart, the disciplined, the worthy...but those set free to believe, access by faith.

Third, the counterintuitive EFFECTS of this alternative way: He calls it LIFE. It's LIVING bread ... bread of LIFE. This bread gives LIFE to the world ... if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever... unless you eat this bread, you have no life in yourselves... As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me, he also will live because of Me..." We go from spiritual death to spiritual LIFE (the word's repeated almost *ad absurdum*).

It's something more than just heaven or life after death ... It's as if even in the here-and-now we are NOT truly alive; UNTIL we EAT THIS, we have NOT really begun to LIVE ... It's as if the diagnosis in the Garden has really come to pass - "*the day you eat of it, you shall surely DIE*"- that death that came upon our whole race is only NOW reversed when God puts a new, living heart in us... gives us New Life...Living Bread. The EFFECT of Life.

Fourth, this one unique alternative to all religion/spirituality/self-help/morality - this Bread of Life is made of a counterintuitive ESSENCE (substance) – "*this bread I give for the life of the world is My flesh!*" And this was something they couldn't swallow – He's referring here to His own death.

This is Jesus Christ saying that HE, the eternal Son of God who had NO BEGINNING ... He had to become substantial ... physical ... The Mind of God, the Logos became flesh ... and this FLESH will be torn and pierced. His body broken for the sins of His people.

Their conventional wisdom had no place for a suffering Messiah ... They didn't need THAT! THEY needed a spiritual handy man; to hang a few pictures or patch a wall – but Jesus wants to level the whole termite-infested building and begin a New Creation.

Jesus Christ is saying, "*Your condition is far worse than you imagine – you need a Substitute! I must give you My whole self... My flesh...My blood ... My death.*" There is an irreparable balance that must be restored – sin won't just go away. If God is TRULY just, then the debts of His people must be paid ... and the penalty is death. A counterintuitive solution – God must become one of us and pay the penalty that justice requires.

And finally, a counterintuitive IMPASSE: at the end of this description of the one living alternative to our dead self-help and dead morality and dead religion, dead karma – when Jesus Christ offered Himself as the one great solution that comes down from God there's a scandal... They grumble like

they did in the *Wilderness Wanderings* (γογγύζω -- same word in the Greek version of the Exodus events -- Exo 17.3; Num 14.27, 14.29, 16.41, 17.5; Psa 106.25).

Some make the paradigm-shift. Others walk away. (61) *“Does this cause you to stumble (Gk: ‘σκανδαλίζω’) i.e., are you scandalized? You have to be scandalized.”*

Then, when many did indeed leave Him, He asks the Twelve, *“Will YOU go away also?”*... And the Twelve Tribal Chiefs of the New Israel reply, *“We will not grumble like the Old Israel in the wilderness ... We will cling to You even though we don’t quite get it ... because ... where else can we go? Only YOU have the words of eternal life.”*

And then a mysterious mention of Judas – who stays physically but has already departed in spirit ... and the seeds are now sown for a fight to the death.

Now, IF this Way, counter to the way we think in our fallen-ness, if this is the Un-Religion and the One Way of Life then how do we make the shift and how to implement this Living Way?

Let me talk about COMING, GOING and RETURNING:

FIRST, you may be COMING to the Gospel, considering Christianity and uniting with a church ... And maybe there are parts of it that ... just rub you the wrong way ... It could be the sexual ethic in Christianity ... It could be some opinion you have of the Church ... or the exclusivity of what Jesus claimed about Himself ... AND you MAY think, *“It was easy for those early Christians but, how can modern people believe this?”*

Well, truth is – it was hard for them to believe too. Paul said the two prevailing mindsets in his day (Jewish worldview and Graeco-Roman worldview) they both found Christianity counterintuitive. Here’s Paul: (1st Cor 1.23-24) *“but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

If you think you can sort of slip in the back pew and not have to stumble ... you should think again. BUT... maybe, you sense God calling you, giving you a new heart...well, trust Him. Meet some other Christians and work through your issues. You’ll find help and will find answers. If you're coming...don’t stop!

Second, COMING and second, GOING: the Father loves to give people to the Son. *“All the Father gives me will come to Me and I will raise them up on the last day...”* So, you who believe: GO! Go tell people. It’s not religious salesmanship or smooth words that get people to believe ... The Father gives them to Jesus. The Spirit brings people to life and then gives them Living Bread to sustain their faith. GO, drop a seed and see what God may do.

Last, do you see yourSELF in this story? Maybe you're a disciple and have really begun to be scandalized by something. It could be some teaching in the Bible you find hard (*“This is a hard word...”* v.60). Maybe

it's a hard providence – i.e. the way God has ordered your life (loss, sickness, divorce or how your life is turning out) and you just feel like “grumbling” or even feel like walking away ... Well, what DO you do?

Well, walking is really the process of falling forward and then returning to standing ... and then repeating that again and again. And the spiritual walk is LIKE that. You get off-kilter again and again, fall ahead and He catches you ... again and again.

Simon Peter and *the Twelve* didn't get it. This talk about eating His flesh and drinking His blood... was a scandal to them too ... But God was drawing them to His Beloved Son ... As they continued trusting Jesus, more and more, they were seeing Him for who He really was... Each new discovery knocked them off balance ... fell a little and then were caught BY Him ... Walking's not always graceful and smooth but keep going ... keep RETURNING to Him.

Be completely honest with Jesus Christ as if He were a real Person...because He IS... Tell Him your doubts and fears...keep eating...keep believing...keep returning...keep trusting.

He has the words of eternal life so...where else can we go?

N O T E S

*Note: This New Testament wording is found in Galatians CH 6.6-8. *“The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”* (Gal. 6.6-8) Both Luther, Calvin and undoubtedly, many other commentators over the centuries) saw these verses as a unit and connected the support of the Good News preacher with the idea of sowing and reaping with the thrust being, “If you have a preacher who reminds you of the Good News every week – support that person! Invest in the Gospel and receive Jesus, again and again!”

Westminster Larger Catechism Q:67 What is effectual calling? A. Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by his word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds,(4) renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.