

Missing Out On Life With God

by Mark Jarvinen

⁴¹ *At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."* ⁴² *They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"*

⁴³ *"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered.* ⁴⁴ *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.* ⁴⁵ *It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.'* *Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me.* ⁴⁶ *No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.* ⁴⁷ *Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.* ⁴⁸ *I am the bread of life.* ⁴⁹ *Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died.* ⁵⁰ *But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.* ⁵¹ *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* **(John 6:41-51)**

We've been working our way through **John 6**, which I guess we could call "**the bread chapter.**" All of these texts relate back to the "**bread miracle,**" the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Last Sunday, we heard Jesus' stunning claim:

***"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty"* (v. 35).**

It was **St. Augustine** who once said to God, "***Thou hast made us for Thyself, and the heart of man is restless until it finds its rest in Thee.***" Augustine was right. And of course, that rest, that deep satisfaction of one's spiritual hunger and thirst, is found only in knowing Christ. But there are those who don't partake of this bread – seemingly barricaded behind a thick wall of unbelief. **Why do they**

remain in unbelief, separated from life with God? Today's text offers three reasons.

I. INATTENTION TO THE FACTS.

Verse 41 says, ***“At this time the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’”*** The Jews referenced here in v. 41 are part of the religious establishment opposed to Jesus, who apparently had some local ties with Nazareth, the place where Jesus grew up. We conclude this because of their grumbling reaction to Jesus claim –in which he said, ***“I am the bread that came down out of heaven.”*** Forget about them trying to understand the implications of Jesus' claim. They said, ***“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?”*** (v. 42). In other words, **“Who does Jesus think he is anyway? He's a home-town boy. The carpenter's son. We know of him. He's nobody special.”**

The *New Yorker* magazine sometime back, shared an account of a Long Island resident who ordered an extremely sensitive **barometer** for personal use in gauging the weather. When the instrument was delivered to his home he was disappointed to discover that the needle appeared to be stuck, pointing to the sector of the barometer marked **“Hurricane.”** After tapping the face of the barometer and then shaking it vigorously several times, the man determined that the merchandise was defective. He put it back in the box and wrote a scathing letter to the manufacturer, and on the following morning, on the way to his office in New York City, mailed it. That evening he returned to Long Island to find that **not only was the**

barometer missing, but his whole house was decimated as well!

The needle of the barometer had been pointed correctly after all. The date was **September 21, 1938**, the day of the terrible hurricane that almost leveled Long Island, as part of the **Great New England Hurricane**, the first major hurricane to strike New England since 1869, killing 682 people and destroying over 57,000 homes.

What does this anecdote tell us? Simply that the truth may well be right under our noses. Often it's our unwillingness to believe the facts, not the absence of the facts that poses the problem. This was the case with these local Jews in our text. They ignored the ministry of **John the Baptist**, who had prepared the way for Jesus, saying ***"Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*** They refused to see Jesus' true identity in the signs he performed, such as turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana, the healing of the royal official's son, or even most recently, the feeding of the 5,000. **Their preconceived notions about Jesus, kept them from believing.**

How many have preconceived notions about Jesus today? Many think they understand who Jesus is without even investigating His claims. Many politely acknowledge Jesus as simply a great moral teacher, but not **C.S. Lewis**, the great 20th century English author who was an agnostic before his conversion to Christ. He writes:

"I am trying to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him, which is: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic –on a

level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity).

Inattention to the facts is one reason why people miss out on life with God, but there's another reason.

II. INADEQUATE ENLIGHTENMENT.

No figure in history has been so widely portrayed in film, in drama, in art or in story, as Jesus. Yet, we ask, ***“How does Jesus become our Savior?”*** Romans 10:17 says, ***“... Faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (the gospel).”*** The Holy Spirit creates faith in the hearts of those who by a work of God's grace stop rejecting the message of Christ and begin to gladly receive it. This is God's mysterious working, an inner opening of the eyes and ears of the soul, awakening us to our need for a Savior and drawing us to faith as Jesus is revealed as the giver of life eternal. Jesus states this unequivocally in v. 44 – ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”***

Rebecca Manley Pippert, author of the classic book on evangelism, **Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World**, shared how the very same day she received Jesus as her Savior, she felt prompted to share the gospel with her father who was a professed **atheist**. He was a self-made man – an intelligent, highly successful businessman who was convinced he needed no one else's help. Pippert tried to shake the prompting to share her faith. She knew

what her Dad would say. Nevertheless, she made the attempt and he responded exactly as she had predicted – sweetly, but with complete skepticism. The Lord nudged her to witness to her father off and on over the next **25 years**. But the results were always the same: nothing, as far as she could see. Then, when he was quite elderly, the Lord nudged again. He was ill and living in a nursing home. Listen as Pippert writes:

“But this time, unknown to me, the soil of Dad’s soul had been fully cultivated; the divine preparation was finally complete. When I shared the Gospel and asked Dad if he wanted to give his life to Christ, he said yes – to my utter astonishment! For the first time in my entire life, my father and I prayed together, hand in hand. The presence of the Lord in that room was astonishing and palpable. Before my eyes, the Spirit of the living God penetrated my father’s heart” (Rebecca Pippert, Discipleship Journal).

This story could be about a daughter’s faithfulness in sharing her faith and the importance of ***“just planting a seed.”*** But it’s also a story about our Heavenly Father’s unseen work of drawing a person to Christ. Many talk about deciding for or choosing Christ, but Jesus said to His own disciples in **John 15:16 – “You did not choose me, but I chose you.”** We think that our choices determine our destiny, and in some sense that’s true, but when it comes to salvation, one of the great truths of Scripture is that it’s not first and foremost about our choice, but rather it’s about God’s drawing. We don’t simply make a decision for Christ purely as a matter of the will. The human will is darkened by and in bondage to sin. Left to our own devices, we would never come to faith. God must draw us to Himself. Rebecca Pippert’s Dad would not have believed in Christ had he not been drawn by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the word of the gospel.

In v. 45, Jesus tells us how this “drawing” work of God happens. There it says: ***“They will all be taught by God.”*** It is an opening of the understanding. It may happen suddenly, or it may happen slowly. It may happen through painful circumstances or a gentle word. It happens to non-believers to draw them to faith and conversion, but it also happens to believers who all need to be continually taught by God. You may, for example, have an “a-ha” moment when something you have known for years but never understood, suddenly becomes clear to you. How many times in Scripture do we see this phenomenon? Take **Luke 24:45** for example, as Jesus ministered to his disciples just before His ascension. It says: ***“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”***

Then, moving along in our text, Jesus says, having been drawn by the Father, a person will be brought to faith in Him. Look at the latter portion of v. 45 where Jesus says – ***“Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.”*** And then, after insinuating that He is the only one who has ever seen the Father, Jesus says in v. 47 – ***“I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.”*** Thus, God brings us to Himself. He draws us – through His Word, the Law and Gospel, convicting us of our sin and heightening our sense of need for a Savior in the midst of the experiences of life – some painful, some joyful – sometimes over a process of many years – sometimes suddenly – until He awakens us to believe, revealing Jesus as the answer to our deepest need. With Jesus as our focus of faith, we are then enabled as believers, by the initiative of the Spirit, to take the next steps in our spiritual growth.

Martin Luther in his explanation of the Third Article in the Small Catechism says it so well –

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith....”

There’s our rationale for evangelism. People cannot come to faith simply by their own reason or strength. The unsaved have no desire for life with God. They are ***“dead in trespasses and sin”*** as Paul writes in **Ephesians 2:1**. It is God Himself who must draw them as they are ***“taught by God.”*** Pray for others, asking God to draw them to Himself. We must preach and share the gospel so people can be ***“taught by God.”***

And so, inattention to the facts and inadequate enlightenment account for unbelief, but there is a third reason ...

III. INEFFECTIVE SYMBOLS

In **vv. 48 – 50** Jesus said,

“I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.”

The Jews whom Jesus addressed on this occasion were still looking back across the centuries to the time when their fathers, under Moses, were fed manna in the wilderness. Jesus makes the point that although this manna kept them alive physically, it could do nothing for them eternally. These people were still hung up on ineffective symbols. They were putting their faith in the symbol instead of the substance.

Many people do that today. They trust in some religious act, like baptism, for example, in which they simply undergo a ritual, instead of trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, which we believe is delivered to us in baptism as a means of God's grace. Or they trust in church membership, or confirmation, or some other religious ceremony as the basis of their life with God instead of the real source of that life, who is Christ, Himself. Jesus said in v. 51 – ***“I am the living bread that came down from heaven.”***

Jesus explains the meaning of his life as ***“bread”*** when he says in the last portion of v. 51 – ***“This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”*** This is a veiled reference to the cross – a portend of things to come. Jesus – who is Life incarnate – at the end of His earthly ministry, would give up his life on the cross – so that we, who are under the curse of death, because of our sin – may receive new life. **Separated from God by sin, the cross made a way back to the Father. That's the gospel.** Life with God is ours as by faith we trust in what Jesus did on the cross for each of us individually. He died that all who believe in Him might live.

Missionaries to the Auca Indians in South America faced a problem as they sought to translate the Bible into the language of the people. There was no equivalent word in Auca for the word ***“reconciled.”*** Struggling with how to share the concept of Christian reconciliation, one day a translator and some Aucas, while traveling through the jungle, came to a narrow deep ravine. The missionary thought they could go no further, but the Aucas quickly took out their

machetes and cut down a large tree so it fell over the ravine. This ***“bridged the gap,”*** permitting everyone to cross the chasm safely. Then the translator learned that the Aucas had a word for ***“tree over the ravine”*** – a very appropriate term for biblical reconciliation, in which through the cross of Christ a way is made for a Holy God to be reunited with sinful humanity. (Sermon Central).

The cross of Jesus Christ is our ***“tree over the ravine.”*** Jesus is our way back to the Father. Jesus Christ, ***“the living bread”*** satisfies our deepest needs and gives us life in His Name. Trusting Jesus is the key to life with God. Let us rejoice in the saving work of Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection means that we don't have to miss out on eternal life with God. **A-men.**