

The Bread of Life

John 6:52-58

There are three miracle breads in John chapter 6. These three miracle breads have great significance and they each represent a particular work of God. To read the chapter for all its worth, we want to appreciate each of the miracles and then to hear the message of Jesus' teaching.

Jesus brought the hunger of the crowd to the attention of the disciples. First, He asked Philip where they could buy bread for so many. This suggests that Philip may have had a mind for math and for the practical problems of how to get what where. But, Philip did not have a solution to the problem of how to feed the multitude. Andrew volunteered that he had found a young boy who had a lunch bag with 5 loaves and 2 fish in it, but, he added, "what are they among so many?" Andrew's suggestion was very bold but then he qualified it by discounting the possible significance of his discovery. Jesus, who knew what He was up to from the moment He raised the question instructed the disciples to organize the crowd for lunch and everyone found a place to sit down. Then He took the boy's lunch and gave thanks, then began distributing the food to the disciples and then to the crowd. They kept on passing out the food until everyone was satisfied. There was no reason to stop eating until you were full. The supply was inexhaustible until the people stopped eating. When everyone finished, they gathered the leftovers and filled 12 baskets (a very small amount when considering how many had eaten but more than twelve times more than they started with) This was also just enough for each of the disciples to eat all they wanted. It seems that if anyone did not eat then that would have been Jesus. There was great spiritual significance in the event, the people had come to Jesus in a state of hunger but as the day concluded they were all satisfied. God's resources had been proven sufficient to meet the people's needs. If you had been there, you would have participated in the most remarkable experience that you had ever heard of. It was a miracle for everyone. Further, you would have the experience of need and resolution as you were cared for and provided for by Jesus.

The crowd was very caught up in this experience. The majority wanted to immediately crown Jesus as their king and rise up against the Romans. When the meeting broke up the disciples were sent across the lake and Jesus joined them in the middle of the lake where they were held up by a storm by walking on the water. The next day when the crowd discovered that Jesus was no longer there they also crossed the lake - looking for Jesus from whom they hoped to get a second lunch.

They were thinking about another bread miracle. This was the miracle of manna that fed the people of Israel during the 40 years of their wilderness wanderings. The manna was used by God to keep His people together. They marched throughout the desert as they were led by God confident that they would be cared for since every morning the manna was on the ground ready to be picked up for their nourishment. The manna kept the nation viable as a fighting force. It kept them unified. It was a constant reminder of God's presence and care. When they moved the manna moved with them and was no longer where they had been. With the manna and water, they could survive anywhere and God also provided water miraculously as well. But, the manna may have also served as a detriment to the people since they perceived it as independent of the will of God for them. Consequently, when they came to Kadesh-Barnea, and heard the reports of the spies, they assumed that they could choose to stay in the wilderness, that it was not necessary for them to go into the land as a matter of survival. The manna became a symbol of their curse rather than their blessing. Disobedience kept them in a state of futureless futility but God preserved them so that the next generation would have a chance. The manna that was a curse for one generation gave hope to the next. God cared for them until their time came. Under Joshua they entered the land claiming the promises of God. At Gilgal, the obedient generation ate of the produce of the land and the manna ceased.

The miracle of the bread and fish created an infatuation with the old miracle of bread. This was the wilderness manna. The time of the manna was romanticized in the minds of the people as the greatest time in their history but it was a miracle of survival rather

than victory. It sustained them during their trial but it was not needed when the blessing came.

The crowds that pursued Jesus and the disciples to the other side thinking only of another lunch and the possibilities that such an event might hold did not realize the way that they were seeking to go was so much less than God's intended purpose. Manna had no more potential in Jesus' day than it had under Moses in the wilderness.

Then, there is the third miracle of bread. Jesus had a dual purpose in feeding the people. They were hungry and He met their need but they were also spiritually dead and they needed life. The third miracle of bread was Jesus Himself. "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and He who believes in Me shall never thirst." The first miracle of bread was a sustaining miracle. The second miracle was a glimpse into the possible, a suggestion of what could be. The third miracle was a fulfillment of the promise, the realization of God's ultimate purpose. He has a plan for us that is beyond this life. "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

We know what Jesus was talking about, He was talking about His cross. There is a dual meaning in the Gospel. The Gospel gives us Jesus' words as they were spoken to the people in Galilee who had experienced the feeding of the 5000. They were the 5000. To eat of this bread for them was to believe in and trust in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Theirs was not to judge Jesus' words but to hear them and to follow Him. They could not know where He would lead them but they could be convinced that He was the Christ and that they could rely on Him to take care of them.

The second meaning of the Gospel was for those to whom it was written. The cross and the resurrection are now in the past. To eat of the bread which was His flesh was clearly to believe in Jesus, trusting that His death on the cross has paid the entire penalty for

our sins and that through His resurrection God has given eternal life to all who so believe. And so, our lives now are only a beginning, they

are not the end of our existence. And there is a direct relationship between this life and the one to come. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have eternal life. If not, you are condemned already. Eternal life is not something that happens when you die. Eternal life begins the moment that you receive Jesus into your life. What happens when you die is a continuation of the life you are now living for God. Love Him now, love Him then. Serve Him now, serve Him then. Enjoy His presence now, enjoy His presence then. Share your life with Him now, experience life with Him then.

Think about it this way, do you anticipate Jesus' coming with confidence or doubt? Paul was extremely confident. "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens..." Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith and not by sight. Wee confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him..."

But John warned of the problem of spiritual insecurity. He offered a remedy. 1 John 2:28; "And now little Children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." Jesus is the bread of life. Eat this bread and enter into eternal life. Eat this bread. It is the substance of eternal life. The children of Israel ate the manna every day. Because they did, it sustained their lives. How much more must we eat from the bread of life for the daily and continuing experience of eternal life.