

John 35 – The Bread from Heaven

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Scripture 1: (Jn. 6:22-34 ESV)

On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."

Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"

Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Scripture 2: (Exod. 16:21-35 ESV)

Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted. On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.'"

So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it.

Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.

And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?"

See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." So the people rested on the seventh day.

Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept

throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt."

And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations." As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

Sermon:

Following the brief "intermission" of Jesus' fifth sign of His divinity: Jesus' walk upon the Galilean waters during the late night and early morning, a private sign witnessed only by the disciples who beheld His glory and divine sovereignty over the created world; John the Evangelist continues his narrative related to the fourth sign: Jesus' miraculous feeding of over five thousand people.

"On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone." Just one day later, after much amazement had occurred, the great crowd which had been following Jesus around Galilee suddenly discovered that He was missing! Jesus disappeared, having quietly slipped away under the watchful gaze of over five thousand pairs of eyes.

- They were somewhere out in the wilderness, likely near the town of Bethsaida, but that was further inland and there was no nearby port town or fishing village.
- They were out in the middle of "no where", stuck between "some where's".
- They knew that there had only been one small boat pulled up on shore nearby; likely the same boat which the disciples had sailed over there from Capernaum in.
- They knew that the disciples had left the evening before and they knew that Jesus did not go with them.

So, where could He be and how did He get there?

Meanwhile, the news that Jesus was out in the wilderness performing miraculous wonders, had spread quickly and widely enough that *"Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks."* Boats from across the Sea of Galilee, from the district capital of Tiberias {a city named for the Emperor Tiberius which had been built by Herod Antipas and was populated largely by Gentiles who had been financially or socially encouraged to settle there} located to the south and west, came looking to see Jesus and to join them because, over the past year, Jesus had become an attraction. He was now a crowd drawing "Main Event"! So surely, when the people heard about what was going on it prompted them to suddenly travel to this remote spot, yet somehow, when they arrived Jesus was gone. This popular "superstar" had managed to give them all "the slip".

"So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus." Now this was a broad and diverse Galilean crowd gathered together for the common purpose of seeing Jesus. Remember that they originally had gathered and were following Him *"...because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick."* (Jn. 6:2 ESV), so now that this massive crowd had been on the receiving end of a Jesus miracle (with everyone being fed from His hand), everybody was *"seeking Jesus"*; but, why?

Why were they actually seeking Jesus?

- Were they earnestly seeking the Kingdom of God as people repentant of their sin or, was it simply because they wanted to get something from Him?
- Were they seeking God's glory or were they simply looking out for “Number One” by asking Jesus, “What's in it for me? (WiifM)”

Fortunately, we do not need to guess about their motives because John very plainly tells us what they were, straight from Jesus' mouth, “*When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?”*”

*Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, **not because** you saw signs, but **because** you ate your fill of the loaves.”*” Ouch.

Although that might sound or seem harsh to us, based on some very wrong, personal impressions and expectations which we tend to make about Jesus' personality, once again the evangelist demonstrates and reminds us that Jesus was a very “real” person. Jesus did not always speak with “sweetness and light”. He was plain-spoken, honest, and straight-forward. Jesus was often very bluntly honest, never sugar coating hard truths just to make them more palatable. He always spoke the truth “in love” because He wanted people to turn away from everything that was false and wrong. Again, John reminds us that when people began to follow Him after He performed signs in Jerusalem, “*Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*” (Jn. 2:24-25 ESV), because He knew (He knows) what is in the heart of man (what is in our heart). Jesus knows that at the core of sinful Man, we are all utterly selfish people who only worship ourselves, seeking self-gratification; therefore, He knew and understood precisely why they were seeking Him. They sought Him for all of the wrong reasons.

Jesus knew that they were only following Him and seeking Him, because they were just looking for a “free meal” therefore, He called them out on it. They sought Him not because of **Who** His Signs demonstrated and proved Him to be, but because of what they believed He could give to them: their “daily bread”. So, He told them, TANSTAAFL (an acronym from Robert Heinlein's “The Moon is a Harsh Mistress”), “There ain't no such thing as a free lunch!”. He told them, “*Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.*”.

Now this part of Jesus' discourse, if taken alone, could be suggested as contradicting our Reformed understanding of *Sola Gratia* and *Sola Fide* because Jesus seems to imply that “*eternal life*” can be received as the reward for or wages of some work that we might could do. However, upon closer examination and in connection with everything the evangelist has previously said within this Gospel, that suggestion quickly fails.

Anyone who has ever been employed understands what Jesus means by “...[working] for food that perishes...”. He means our “daily grind”, all of the effort that we put into the things which are transient and temporary, even including the necessary things such as: food, water, shelter, and other survival related things; but also including other important things like: a nicer car, a nicer house, a bigger yard, more books, or more yarn. Although each of those things are intrinsically good and each one can be important for us, none of them are intended to be the most important thing to us. Unfortunately, for many people, they tend to become so. They become idols that we inadvertently end up worshiping, unintentionally and unnaturally. However, neither our “daily grind” nor even the good things in this world are the fullness of the work and food which Jesus intends for God's children. “*Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”*” The work of God which must be done to receive “...the food that endures to eternal life...” is simply, and truly, to believe in the Son of Man, the one whom the LORD God has sent and on whom “...God the Father has set his seal.”.

Again, this dialogue is what drives the incorrect suggestion that our faith in Jesus Christ is the work which justifies or earns a Christian the wage or reward of eternal life: that faith itself, the act of believing, is a “saving work” (as held by some Arminians and all semi-Pelagians); because it ignores the simple fact that a person cannot believe in: cannot have *pisteuo* in; Jesus except that they are first *anōthen*: “born again” or “born from above” (John 3:5-7).

- Faith in Jesus Christ is the monergistic gift of God, given to sinful men whereby, through that faith, all of the adopted children of God will trust Jesus for their eternal salvation as His worked righteousness is imputed to us: is counted as our own personally worked righteousness; therefore, justifying us before the only Holy God and enabling us to stand in the judgment so that we are “...*passed from death to life.*” (Jn. 5:24 ESV).

Therefore, even though our faith in Jesus is ultimately the freely given gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-10), we are still responsible to actively engage in the work of believing as a consequence of receiving it:

- our ability to believe is given, and
- our desire to believe is given,
- thus we must still be believing since the regenerate Elect, the repentant Christian, cannot help but to believe in and trust Christ with their whole being: body, mind, and soul;
- thus, by believing, we do the necessary work of God.

Unfortunately, those people who were chasing Jesus all around the Sea of Galilee; those who were seeking Jesus for their own benefit rather than for God's glory; further proved that they just did not “get it”, that they did not understand, and that they were only seeking Jesus for what they believed He could give them when “...*they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"*”.

Now, I am not sure whether they were suffering from prideful hubris, selfish entitlement, or just plain ignorance but, they certainly proved Jesus' point and they proved, what would also become the Apostle Paul's point, that those who remain “...*enslaved to the elementary principles of the world...*” (Gal. 4:3 ESV), and who surrender to “*the desires of the flesh*” (Gal. 5:17 ESV): “*sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*” (Gal. 5:19-21 ESV). Everyone who belongs to the world will always chase after worldly things and worldly satisfactions, while everyone belonging to Jesus Christ will constantly strive for holiness, seeking God's glory.

All those Jews who were seeking Jesus asked Him for a sign after He had just given them a Sign; the very Sign which they were now asking for. They proved, by doing so, that they truly were “*a wicked and adulterous generation*” (Matthew 16:1-4) just like the generation of Israelites that died in the wilderness. Although, to their credit, they did recognize a connection between Jesus' feeding of the crowd and the Israelites receipt of manna, but they failed to understand what the connection was or meant, prompting Jesus to answer them, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.*”. Unfortunately:

- Both generations missed the point that the LORD is our Provider.
 - He provides everyone with their “daily bread” and He provides the Elect with their faith in Christ.

- Even when the divine truth was “plain as day” and “staring them in the face”, both generations failed to understand what God was actually doing, and they both failed to appropriately respond to God's providence.

When the manna first appeared, Moses explained to Israel, *“This is what the LORD has commanded: Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.”*

So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it.

Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.”. Over the course of that first week, all of Israel had seen and all of Israel had received God's blessing: the miracle of manna; but, even after they received it and ate it, they failed to believe and trust God; they failed to have *pistewo* since, *“On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.”*

Moses, according to the LORD's instruction, commanded them to gather as much of the manna as they could eat *“Morning by morning...”*, and on the sixth day to gather twice as much in preparation for the Sabbath. Meanwhile, there were still some who tried to keep manna “left-overs” during the week, but they found that *“...it bred worms and stank.”* (Exod. 16:20 ESV). Then they further demonstrated their personal failure to trust and obey God's Word, demonstrating their lack of faith, by refusing to heed His simple command to gather twice as much on the sixth day.

This may not seem like a “big deal” to us, but it truly was. Even this transgression was sinful; it was still cosmic treason. *“And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?”*. Remember, the Ten Commandments had not yet been given to Moses so, the Israelites were still living in a probationary period as they traveled between Egypt and Mount Sinai and, during this short season, they had very few restrictions or commands to follow, similar to Adam and Eve while they were in the garden. Even then, Israel was being tested to see whether they would be faithful and obedient, just as Adam was tested.

- Adam and Eve were told, “Do not eat from this one tree!”, but they did; and
- Israel was told, *“Gather only what you need each day, except for the sixth and seventh when you will gather twice as much on the sixth and none on the seventh because the seventh is the Sabbath, a day of rest.”*, but they did not.
- Both groups failed their test.

It sounds simple enough, but since neither group could handle it, I expect that we also would have failed it, despite our earnest protestation. But the point these two stories demonstrate for us is that like Adam and Eve, although both the Israelites and the Jews whom Jesus fed, received and directly benefited from unqualified miracles performed by God Almighty Himself, they did not truly believe the undeniable evidence.

- The miracles were both obviously miraculous.
- The miracles were tangible and their effect was measurable.
- The miracles left evidence of their miraculous performance afterwards, so that others could see and know their truth: the Israelites filled a jar with an *“omer of manna”* (which was about two quarts) and

eventually, they kept it in (or with) the ark of the covenant (and Aaron's budded staff), while the disciples diligently gathered together all of the “leftovers” and filled up twelve baskets (6:13).

The most astonishing part of these two stories is that while both the Israelites and the Jews of Galilee ate the clear product of a divine miracle, they both failed to believe the source of the miracle:

- the Israelites did not believe that the LORD would provide for them according to the means and schedule which He had promised; while,
- the Jews did not believe that Jesus could or would provide for them according to the example of Moses (something He had already done once before) and upon their selfish demand and whim of command.

Both ate but neither believed. They lacked the understanding of faith because they did not understand what “true bread” is, “*For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*”: the LORD's blessed life-giving and life-sustaining provision and the regenerating work of His Holy Spirit.

The eyes of their heart were closed to the truth; therefore, they failed to obey their Creator and their ultimate Provider; the One to whom we all owe our complete allegiance. They had all of the evidence necessary to encourage their faith and to prove their faith true. They had the opportunity to move beyond the simplicity of mere faith, into the fullness of confidence and assurance and yet, they still did not believe. Today, we possess far less tangible or physical evidence to support our faith than they did but, because of the Holy Spirit's working within the Elect, now just as then, we do not require physical evidence to believe or to have faith. Regardless, we do still possess a variety of evidences: the testimony of the martyrs and all of the saints who have gone before us, the evidences of Scripture, the evidences provided by archaeology, and even the evidence of secular, extra-biblical sources which confirm the Bible's veracity; which strengthen and encourage our faith, but our faith is not ultimately dependent on them.

- We know that our faith is true and we would continue to believe it even without all of the extra evidence and proof, because our God is true; because “*...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*” (Heb. 11:1 ESV).
- We have an assurance and a conviction that both the Israelites and these First Century Jews lacked, because we have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit inside every Elect believer.

Although each of us might already be secure and confident within our trust of Jesus Christ, we each also need to consider this part of the story as a warning or potential chastisement to us, because it describes a too common, inappropriate response to Jesus; looking to Him for what He can do for you, or what you wish He would do for you, rather than looking to Him simply because of Who He is.

How often do we, might you, turn to Jesus Christ because of what we wish or hope that He would do?

- Every time we get into trouble.
- Every time we have a problem that we cannot solve on our own.
- Every time we feel afraid and are helpless

Then, we might find it easier to turn to Christ as a “last-ditch chance”; as our final hope, beyond all reason.

Then, we might pray for what we want, forgetting about and ignoring God's purposes and plan in favor of our own wants and desires; our “felt needs”.

Then, we might try to bargain with God, saying “I will do XYZ, if God would only do ABC.”

Then, after our attempts a deal-making fail and our wishes do not come true, if that were the only reason for why we turned to Christ, then our faith would be proven false as it was shattered by our self-centeredness; if that were our **only** reason for turning to Jesus.

The sad fact is, many professing Christians treat God as if He were an all-benevolent Sky-Daddy, or some kind of Santa Claus, or Genie that we keep bottled up and hidden until we “need” Him, whereby our wish becomes His command. But that is not God. That is not who God is and, if we are being honest with one another, no one would want to actually worship a so-called god like that; like some controlled magical creature that is enslaved to our will and fed by our devotion.

True faith, truly God-given *pisteuo*, is strong enough to endure our disappointment and discouragement at not getting whatever we want.

True faith perseveres and preserves us because it looks beyond the veil; it looks past this present life and rests its gaze upon “...*the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*” (Heb. 11:10 ESV) and considers all of God's many promises of provision, “...*not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar...*” acknowledging “...*that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*” (Heb. 11:13 ESV).

That is the critical difference between the regenerate Elect and worldly people like the Israelites and the Jews. Worldly people are most concerned about that which is fleeting and temporary, seeking instantaneous self-gratification, satisfying all of their wants and desires; whereas the Elect children of God are most concerned with things that are eternal and lasting, believing and knowing that Christ will provide for all of their needs and satisfy all of their good desires.

The final lesson and question for us concerning our own quest seeking Christ, is this: Do we seek Him for our own sake, looking for the manna that He will provide as enough food to last us for one day or, do we seek Him for His own sake, for His glory, looking for the food that He shall give us, His beloved brothers and sisters, which we may enjoy with Him, forever and ever?

So, why are you seeking Jesus: is it because you have seen the Signs which declare who He is and believe, or is it because you have {eaten your fill of His provision} and you would simply prefer to continue doing so?

AMEN