

BaptistWay: The Bread of Life

December 5, 2014

- *The BaptistWay lesson for Dec. 21 focuses on John 6:25-51.*

My sister is a fantastic baker. She owns a shop in southeast Louisiana and produces an incredible volume of delicacies, creating just about any shape or size confection. Thus far, the most unusual was a delicious groom's cake made to look like a tire that's been driven through the mud. Western civilization has learned to make our food look unappetizing and pay handsomely for it.

Most of us in the United States take for granted our daily servings of food. In fact, with climbing obesity rates, we apparently have more than we need for our sustenance, especially around the holidays. But for millions throughout the world, and for most of those Jesus addressed, starvation was a very real possibility. A single loaf of bread could mean the difference between life and death.

Thus, Jesus described himself as the "Bread of Life." And, even today, humanity, whether we know or admit it, is desperate for the sustenance he provides for our souls. He desires and is capable of satisfying our deepest hungers.

According to John 6:1-15, Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000 in the wilderness to the point of satisfaction—a rarity for most of them. This supernatural satiation led the multitudes to believe Jesus was the foretold prophet mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:15—a second Moses who fed thousands in the wilderness (v. 14). As a result, they saw the possibility of a "chicken in every pot" and determined to make him their king forcibly.

To prevent this error, Jesus slipped away and stayed hidden, even from his disciples. He later reappeared walking on the Sea of Galilee (v. 19), joining

his closest followers for a boat ride to Capernaum. Arriving at the shore, the crowds greeted him, but Jesus knew their motives hadn't changed. He called out their greed and misunderstanding (vv. 25-26), and then further elaborated (vv. 27-58) as he taught in the Capernaum synagogue (v. 59).

He came for more

Apparently, food is a universal distraction. Jesus wanted his first century audience to think deeper, more eternally, by focusing not on food, but on the Provider who nourishes the soul and offers eternal life (v. 27, Revelation 7:16). Admittedly, it's challenging. Our focus often is temporal and self-gratifying. Spiritual teaching, especially in a world that delights in having its ears "tickled" (2 Timothy 4:3) must be carefully examined for its orthodoxy (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1), using Scripture for guidance (2 Timothy 3:16).

Just as earning a paycheck in order to buy bread takes work, searching out spiritual food that promotes growth and health requires effort. Not all spiritual food is good for us; false doctrine may sound helpful for a time, but its lies destroy and derail faith. "Health and wealth" gospels—physical health and financial blessing are God's will for all Christians to be achieved by fulfilling certain standards—are certainly appealing but are unsubstantiated Scripturally, even promoting idolatry in some cases.

Jesus explained a clear focus on him is the only way to please God, because God approves of him (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22).

He challenges the status quo

Stuck in legalistic thinking, the people then asked Jesus what they must do "to do the works God requires" (v. 28). In all fairness, it's the only way they've ever known; God's favor has always come—in their understanding—through compliance with Moses' law. Unfortunately, too many 21st century Christians believe in salvation by grace through faith

but live as though maintaining that hope comes by steadfastly following rules. Jesus uncomplicates it for us all: “Believe in the one (God) has sent” (v. 29). It’s a statement implying surrender and trust, not just simply acknowledging Jesus’ identity.

Although Jesus recently had fed more than 5,000 to satiation and walked on the water, the crowd demanded additional signs in order to believe (v. 30). They certainly recognized him as a teacher from God (John 3:2), but to be the next Moses, he would have to provide more than bread or fish; he’d have to provide food from heaven—manna (v. 31; Exodus 16).

He proclaims his divinity

Jesus called out their misplaced focus once again—rather than worshipping the Provider of the miracle in the wilderness, they venerate Moses (v. 32). And now, God offers to satisfy their deepest hungers through the spiritual bread that gives life to the world (v. 33).

Jesus then boldly declared, “I am the bread of life” (v. 35). In this statement, not only did he identify himself as the bread from heaven—contrary to the manna they expect—but he used the significant expression, *ego eimi* (“I am”), the same phrase as God’s self-description to Moses in Exodus 3:14. In essence, Jesus declared his divinity.

He further assured his listeners that coming to him not only satiates hunger, but also thirst (John 4:10-14), with assurances all are welcome without qualification or condition (v. 37). And the fact Jesus fulfills exactly and only what God wills is a promise of security and salvation for believers (vv. 38-40).

For those who knew Jesus’ family and observable history, his statements probably were nothing short of shocking. They even grumbled about him, protesting his claims as unreasonable (vv. 41-42). Jesus knew they’d never believe the truth about him as long as they were complaining, so he told

them to stop.

Of course, as people who watched him grow or who grew up with him, his pronouncements were unbelievable. How could he be the link between God and humanity? But Jesus didn't need their affirmation; God would reveal his true identity (vv. 43-45). Instead, Jesus tried to get them back on track with his earlier point: He is the living bread who came down from heaven (vv. 48-50). Those who believe in him by faith will live forever, because of the sacrifice of his flesh—his death—on behalf of the world (v. 51).

He calls us to believe

“Satisfaction guaranteed” is an expression used by manufacturers and companies to assure customers of the reliability or quality of their product or service. Customers are entitled to their expectations and given sole discretion as to the acceptability of the product or service they receive.

Jesus' claims in today's focal passage challenge us to believe in the satisfaction he freely offers to meet our deepest needs and yearnings. We all hunger for gratification; it's human nature. And we meet our various desires in different ways—at the gym, with chocolate or a cup of coffee, shopping, in relationships, by being busy, with news or information, playing video games, isolating ourselves, obtaining the latest technological gadget or with the company of the television.

Think for a moment about how you cope, how you fulfill those deep parts of you that surface in the still and quiet—those spaces of your heart, mind and life that only Jesus and you know the truth about. Who or what do you seek to satisfy your deepest needs? Jesus promises satisfaction. Will you call out to him today? Spend some time in honest prayer with the Savior who never will drive you away, but will keep you forever and raise you up (6:37, 39-40).