

John 6:22–40

I. John 6:22–25 — On the next day [after the feeding of the five thousand and after Jesus' coming to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee] the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea [those who had not already returned home] 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 [a city on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee] 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 [a city on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee], seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?”

When the people ask Jesus, “*when* did you come here?” we know what they’re really asking at the same time is, “*How* did you come here?” That’s a simple question with a “simple” answer isn’t it? We know that during the night Jesus walked on the sea until He came to the disciples in their boat and when they had received Him into the boat, immediately they were at the land to which they were going. A simple question with a simple answer. But in this case, to answer the question would be dangerous and misleading.

II. John 6:26 — Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs [not because you understand the meaning of the signs and the truths they point to], but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”

As always, Jesus penetrates immediately to the heart. The problem here isn’t so much being “*earthly*-minded” as it is being “*carnally*-minded.” It was Jesus Himself who multiplied the bread and the fish so the people could eat. As one who could Himself be wearied (Jn. 4:6) and thirsty (Jn. 19:28) and hungry (Jn. 4:8; Lk. 4:2), Jesus understood the people’s genuine need for physical sustenance and nourishment (cf. Mk. 8:1-3). Likewise, Jesus had no problem enjoying good food (Mat. 11:19; Lk. 5:29-30). The problem is that the pattern of the people’s thinking and desires was essentially of the flesh: materialistic, temporal, rooted in and defined by this present age—by life in this world as we know it today. All their thoughts and desires were ultimately shaped and bounded by these things and so when they came *seeking Jesus*, they had already cut *themselves* off from *Jesus*. That’s why Jesus said to them, and why He says to all of us:

III. John 6:27 — “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.”

When Jesus says, “Do not work for the food that perishes,” He’s obviously not saying we should stop working to earn a living (cf. 2 Thess. 3:10) or we shouldn’t care at all about physical food for our stomachs. Isn’t the point what we’re seeking “first” (cf. Mat. 6:33)? Not “first” as in “first in a list,” but “first” as in “foundationally first.” The point is that upon which we’ve set the highest premium, the highest value and importance, and therefore that which is fundamentally shaping and defining *all* our pursuits in life.

“Do not work for the food that *perishes*.” Jesus doesn’t call it earthly food or physical food or food for the body or the stomach. He calls it “the food that perishes,” and the reason He uses this

language is to teach us wisdom. Is it wisdom to give one's life over to the pursuit of food *that perishes*? On the one hand, the food *itself* perishes in the very process of its being used and consumed by our bodies (cf. Col. 3:22), and we know this is true because all too soon after we've eaten we'll be hungry again. The food, having "perished," can no longer satisfy. Therefore, no matter how much of this perishable food we eat, it can never keep away death, much less give us the true and abundant and eternal life that belongs to the age to come. Doesn't this put things into perspective? And isn't it this perspective that ought to teach us all true wisdom?

"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life." If physical food perishes as its eaten with the result that we're soon hungry again and that we one day "perish" ourselves, there's also a food that *endures*. Can you see the beauty, now, of that word "endures"? In other words, there's another kind of food that does not perish as it's eaten and that therefore leaves us always satisfied so that we never again have any unsatisfied hunger. This is a food that actually gives and sustains within us *eternal* life. Remember that eternal life isn't just unending life. Eternal life is the life of the age—or we could say of the unending ages—to come. It's first of all a quality of life, but a quality of life that by its very nature is indestructible and everlasting. In contrast with the food that perishes, there is a food that *endures to eternal life* which, Jesus says, "the Son of Man will give to you."

There's an implicit emphasis in these words on the food that endures to eternal life being a freely given, gracious gift. Jesus says, "which the Son of Man will *give* to you." When Jesus says that we ought to "work" for this food that He gives, He's not saying that we ought to work in order to be given this food (any more than He's saying that we shouldn't work in order to be given the food that perishes). What He is saying is that this food that *only* the Son of Man can give ("for on Him God the Father has set His seal") and that the Son of Man *gives* so *freely* ought to be the one thing in life that we prize above everything else and that is therefore fundamentally shaping and defining all of our pursuits in life (that's the "*work*"). He's saying that our whole life—with all of its mundane pursuits and enjoyments—ought to be a whole-hearted "working for" *this* freely given food – not for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life.

But what Jesus says isn't what the people hear.

IV. John 6:28 — Then they said to him, "What must we do, that we may work the works of God?"

Can you hear the pride and self-confidence in these words? Can you see how this is a twisting and a distorting of what Jesus just said? And are we convicted of how we often think in the same way? The people want to keep some semblance of "control." They want a "list" of the works that God requires so they can go out and do those works and be given this "food" that Jesus speaks of. But when Jesus speaks of "working," He's speaking of "work" that transcends any kind of list because of the very nature of what it is that we're "working for" – "*food that endures to eternal life* which the Son of Man will *give* to you"! What work could we ever do that would merit the reward of food that endures to eternal life? It's precisely *because* this food is a freely-given, gracious gift that all "control" is wrested from us and we're called to a life that's wholly given over to the treasuring and the valuing of this food that's beyond all price.

Jesus said, “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.” And the people respond, “What must **we do**, that **we may work** the works of God?”

V. John 6:29 — Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

The people have twisted Jesus’ words, so now Jesus will use their own categories of thinking and speaking and turn them inside out and upside down—or rather right-side out and right-side up. Notice that Jesus doesn’t say anything at all about *us* “working the works of God.” He doesn’t say: “This is what you must do to be working the works of God,” but only, “This *is* the work *of God*, that **you believe** in him whom he has sent.” The Jews spoke of “works” (plural) that they could perform and accomplish. Jesus speaks only of one “work” and He carefully avoids any idea that this is a work that we “perform.”

What do you think Jesus means when He says, “This is the work *of God*”? The Jews were thinking of works that *God required them to do*, but Jesus seems to be speaking at least in some sense of a work that *God Himself does* in us (a work that belongs to God and originates in Him) and therefore also of a work that God *requires from us*. Listen to His words again and see if you hear this twofold emphasis: “This is *the work of God*, that *you believe* in Him whom *He* has sent.” If you believe in Him whom God has sent, then you can know that “this is the work of God”: It’s the work God has done in you (cf. Jn. 9:3) even as God has also done the work of “sending” the one in whom you believe. Furthermore, if you’re truly believing in Him whom God has sent, then you can also know that you are “fulfilling” the work—even the works (plural)—that God requires of you. This is the **one all-encompassing** “work” that God requires from you (“work” being now wholly redefined*): that you believe in Him whom He has sent. This is the work of God!

Do you see how this once more takes all “control” away from the people?—And all “control” away from us? There is no list of works for us to accomplish. Instead, our whole entire life is to be one continuous “work” of believing Him whom God has sent – of submitting and surrendering ourselves to Him and to His word and of treasuring and valuing above all else the food that He gives, the food that endures to eternal life. But the people still want to keep some semblance of “control.”

VI. John 6:30–31 — 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.’”

Haven’t the people already seen many of Jesus’ signs? We read at the beginning of this chapter:

- John 6:2 — And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

* Contrast: Rom. 3:27-28; 4:4-5; 9:32; 11:6; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5; Eph. 2:8-9

And what about Jesus' miraculous feeding of the multitude just the day before? Why are the people apparently less impressed today than they were yesterday? Because yesterday, they felt more in control. Yesterday, they saw Jesus fitting their agenda. Today, that's not what they're seeing and so they begin to withdraw to a "safe" place. If the "work" that they are to do (*ergozomai/ergon*; vv. 28-29) is believe in Jesus as the one God has sent, then what "work" does Jesus do (*ergozomai*) that *they* might "see" (and judge) and "believe"? What does the miraculous feeding of the multitude really "prove" after all, when (after all) they could say to Jesus, "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness," and even quote the Scriptures: "As it is written, 'He gave them bread *from heaven* to eat'" (cf. Exod. 16:4, 15; Neh. 9:15; Ps. 78:24-25; 105:40)? God had already provided bread *from heaven* for His people in the wilderness through Moses. It was expected that God would do even greater works through the Messiah. But was the feeding of the five thousand really a greater work? Did the multiplication of the five barley cakes and two fish really compare with "bread *from heaven*"? So the people are essentially asking, "What greater work do you perform—greater even than providing us with bread *from heaven* for forty years—that we may see (and judge for ourselves) and believe."

There's a certain legitimacy to what the people are asking for. Jesus doesn't deny the need for a greater work, but what He does deny is that their definition of what is "greater" is truly valid.

VII. John 6:32–33 — Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven [it was not through Moses or even in the days of Moses that you were given "bread from heaven"], but my Father gives you the *true* bread from heaven [it's what He is giving to you even now]. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

The point Jesus is making is that this is the only kind of "greater work" there is. The people want to rate the signs of Jesus on a sliding scale with some being greater than others, but there are really only two categories of "works": those that function as "signs" pointing to the reality, and those that are the reality itself. The people want Jesus to perform a work that's greater than His miraculous feeding of the five thousand (and greater than the manna in the wilderness), but for any work to be truly greater than these (in the true sense of that word), it must no longer be the sign, but rather the very substance and reality to which the sign points (cf. Deut. 8:3).

So think about it. Jesus has miraculously multiplied five barley cakes and two fish to feed the multitude. What, then, is the only greater work there is? The only "greater work" is to give to us not the perishable food, but the food that endures to eternal life. And *this is* the greater work that Jesus says He does, for He is Himself the true bread from heaven. He is Himself the bread that endures to eternal life. The manna that God gave through Moses wasn't a false or a counterfeit "bread from heaven," but neither was it the "true" bread from heaven. It was the type and not the archetype; it was the shadow and not the substance; it was the lesser and not the greater. What then is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world? He *is* the "archetype" and the "substance" and the "greater." He *is* the "*true*" bread from heaven.

What is our definition of "greater"? What is it that "impresses" us the most – that causes us to be most amazed and moved to wonder and praise and worship? Is it the miraculous feeding of the

five thousand with perishable food or is it the food that endures to eternal life that He gives so freely to us? Which food is it that you're working for?

The people in John 6 were blinded to the greater work that Jesus does. They were blinded because they still wanted to keep some semblance of control.

VIII. John 6:34 — They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Do you see in this culpable blindness of the people a mirror image of our own blindness apart from God's grace? The people apparently understood Jesus to say that “the bread of God is *that which* [*ho*; cf. NASB] comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (rather than “*he who*”). They're still thinking of perishable bread that must be given repeatedly, over and over again to satisfy a hunger that keeps on coming back. They will believe in Jesus, they say, *if* He gives them this bread always.

IX. John 6:35 — Jesus said to them, “**I am** the bread of life [*I am* the bread that endures to eternal life; *I am* the bread that gives life to the world]; he who comes **to me** shall not hunger, and he who believes **in me** shall never thirst.”

Jesus isn't just stating facts. He is doing that, but He's doing much more. He's extending an invitation indiscriminately to all (“come to me”; “believe in me”), and He's holding forth a promise (“and you will never hunger or thirst; you will be wholly satisfied with eternal life”).

How do we come to Jesus? We come to Jesus by *believing in Him*. What does it mean to believe in Jesus? To believe in Jesus means *coming to Him*. There are certain things that we must believe *about* Jesus (about His person and His work), but in the end Jesus calls us not just to believe things about Him but to believe *in Him* and to come *to Him*. Listen again to the words Jesus speaks, and see how they confront us with the inescapable necessity of a choice – of either coming to Him or not coming to Him; of either believing in Him or not believing in Him. “**I am** the bread of life; he who **comes to me** shall not hunger, and he who **believes in me** shall never thirst.”

But what if the Jews don't believe? What if they refuse to come to Jesus? Does this discredit His testimony? Does this prove that He can't be who He says He is?

X. John 6:36–37 — “But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and he who comes to me I will never cast out.”

All along, the people have been striving to keep some semblance of “control.” But now what does Jesus do? He pulls the rug completely out from underneath us. He strips us of all control in the most “breathtaking” way possible. And in the process of stripping us of all “control,” He reveals to us the unshakable foundation of all our peace and security.

What say did I have in the fact that I would be one of those whom the Father gives to Jesus? That *I* have come to Jesus is not *ultimately* due to my choice (though I did make a genuine and real choice), but to His prior sovereign choice of me – to the fact that He chose me to *give* to His Son.

My believing in Him today and my coming to Him today is rooted in this glorious reality, and we have to be ever so careful never to turn this around. The Father did not give me to Jesus because I came to Jesus and believed in Jesus, for then I would have something to boast about. I come to Jesus and I believe in Him in some mysterious and wonderful way “because” (though we cannot finally explain the “because”) the Father chose me and gave me to His Son. Therefore, there is no one that the Father has given to the Son who will fall through the cracks. There is “no one” who will ever fail to believe. “*All that the Father gives Me,*” Jesus says, “will come to Me, and he who comes to me I will never cast out.” Can you hear again both the *invitation* and the *promise* in these words? “Come to Me,” Jesus says indiscriminately to all (that’s the invitation), “and I will never cast you out (that’s the promise)!”

And yet Jesus is saying more than this. Even as Jesus invites and promises He shows that nothing has been left to chance because nothing has been left *ultimately* to our “control.” This is a good and a wonderful thing, even if it’s also deeply offensive to our fleshly pride. All that the Father has given to Jesus **will** come to Him, and the one who comes to Jesus **He** will never cast out. When Jesus says He will “never cast out” He’s not saying that someone might still cast themselves out or fall out of their own will. When Jesus says He will “never cast out,” what He’s also saying, necessarily, is that He will “forever keep in.” *Who* will He keep in? All those who come to Him. And *why* will He keep them in? Not ultimately or finally *because they* have come to Him but *rather* because it is the Father who has *given them* to Him. This explains why Jesus goes on to say in verses 38-39:

XI. John 6:38–39 — “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, **that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me**, but raise it up on the last day.”

Brothers and sisters, do you see just *how* secure we are? Our perseverance in faith is wholly bound up with the honor of the Son and with His obedience to His Father’s will. All those that the Father has given to Jesus will come to Jesus; and of these, it is the Father’s will that Jesus lose not a single one but preserve them and keep them until He raises them up on the last day. This is why we all rejoice exceedingly in these words of Jesus: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but to do [to execute and to accomplish in full] the will of Him who sent Me.”

Do you see now how we’re left without even the faintest semblance of being “in control”? And do you see how it’s in this very reality that we have the perfect certainty and assurance of our salvation – that we who have truly *come* to Jesus and *believed* in Him *will* finally be raised up on the last day? It’s in this very reality—if our hearts are not hardened—that we’re most humbled and emptied of ourselves and so enabled to **come to Jesus** and to be **always coming to Him**, to **believe in Jesus**, and to be **always believing in Him**, to be **always working** not for the food that perishes but for that food that endures to eternal life. This explains why Jesus emphasizes again in verse forty the invitation and the promise.

XII. John 6:40 — “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him [that’s the invitation] should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day [that’s the promise].”

Are you looking on the Son and believing in Him? Have you come to Him? Is the “true” food that Jesus gives the one thing in life that you’re “working” for—that’s fundamentally shaping and defining all your pursuits in life? Jesus said: “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.” Jesus also said, “**I AM** the bread of life [the *true* “bread from heaven”]; he who comes **to me** shall not hunger, and he who believes **in me** shall never thirst.”