

The Bread of Life Came Down From Heaven

John 6:26-35, February 6, 2011

Epiphany Sunday V

Beloved of the Lord.....With all that is going on in the world today, the violence in Cairo, the floods of Australia, the famine in Africa, corrupt powers at home, this world stands on the brink of collapse. Every day it seems more evident there is a great upheaval just around the corner. At times such as these it is very easy to grow fearful about the future of the next generation, and all they might suffer. Yet in the words of Jesus today there is indeed a way to comfort our hearts, and also the hearts of our children. We teach our children that Jesus is the Bread of Life who came down from heaven to save us from our sins and deliver us from this evil world. By the power of His Gospel Word which we feed our children, the Bread of Life will nurture and strengthen their faith. Living in the midst of a sinful world, we look to the Rock that is higher than us, that Rock who gives living waters to the thirsty soul. Jesus said, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." With this Bread of Life we live forever.

I. The wrong reasons for following Jesus. As we look at the words of the people in our lesson today, it is apparent they were following Jesus for the wrong reasons. Just one day earlier, Jesus performed a great miracle by feeding five thousand people with five barely loaves and two small fishes. When the people wanted to make Him a king, He departed. Later that night Jesus did another great miracle by walking on the waters to His disciples in a boat. Yet when the people caught up with Him the next day Jesus said nothing of this miracle. He wanted them to follow His Word, not His miracles. "Ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled."

Jesus performing countless miracles during His earthly ministry only to confirm the Word He preached, that He was indeed the Son of God with all power and authority. His miracles played second fiddle to the saving word He preached. Thus when we weigh in the scales the MIRACLES of Jesus and the WORDS of Jesus, the words Jesus spoke were far more important than His miracles. Miracles heal only the body, but the Gospel Word heals the soul. Forgiven souls which believe in Christ's forgiveness receive heaven, but unforgiven souls who despise Christ's forgiveness receive damnation. We are not saved by miracles, but the external and written Word of God alone offers to all sinners forgiveness of all sin. There is not one passage in the whole Bible where God tells us to follow ministers, preachers, popes or priests who perform

miracles. Rather Jesus foretells, "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Since we are now living in the End Times, we should especially watch out for those deceivers that do great miracles, great signs, lying wonders! Do not follow them or be deceived! Rather listen to and follow the true words of Jesus which we find in our Bibles. He alone gives living waters to the thirsty soul. Jesus said, "he that believeth on Me shall never thirst."

Jesus also said, "Ye seek me because ye did eat the loaves and were filled." Jesus does not want anyone to follow Him, thinking they will reap blessings on earth for doing so. Instead God promises His children suffering for the sake of His name, not happiness, material wealth or good health. Let us therefore beware of prosperity preachers who teach that if you give your heart to God, if you obey His commandments, if you tithe ten percent, God will make you rich and you'll never lack for anything. I can't help but think of a friend who told me about a church he once visited. Inside there was a big picture of the pastor. He was richly dressed with a fine suit, a golden watch and neckless. My friend thought it funny that there wasn't a picture of Jesus, but a big picture of the pastor. Obviously that is the type of church that is selling something. They were selling Christ for a profit, namely they were teaching souls that if they follow Christ, they too will merit God's blessings. Yet once again, the words of Jesus in our Bibles make all things clear, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." "The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

There is yet one more wrong reason for following Jesus, namely earthly glory. It was with pride the people said, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God!" Likewise, "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." These two statements reveal much, namely their road to heaven was by good works. Moses was their great ancestor who brought down bread from heaven. They were God's chosen people because God did all these great miracles for them.

Even when we hear such words we inwardly cringe at their pride and immediately we think, "I'm glad I'm not like them". Yet this very thought reveals we are just like them, proud by nature, proud at heart. If we are proud of our ancestors, proclaiming the great things they did by coming to America, or the great things they accomplished while in America, we are failing to glorify God who in mercy brought them to America. While we can thank God some of our

ancestors held fast and faithful to God's Word, and they rightly taught their children that Jesus is the Bread of Life who came down from heaven, we should not be proud in the sense that they merited or earned this Bread of Life. Neither have we. All the goodness therefore which we enjoy today in our country, comes not by merit of our ancestors, but God's mercy alone.

Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." From generation to generation it has been God alone who has worked saving faith into sinful hearts by the preaching of God's Word, by the teaching of the Bread of Life who came down from heaven offering to the world His forgiveness of sins. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." The Word of God itself is the carrier which brings and carries from heaven the Bread of Life, forgiveness for our hungry soul. If we want to speak of a great and notable miracle, let us speak of the miracle of our God-given faith. Though we were born in sin, God taught the Gospel Word to our hearts so we were born from above, born of water and the Spirit. Another greater miracle is this: we still have Christ crucified and the full truth of God's Word! And while we ought to honor greatly those fathers and mothers who sacrificed much so their children would have the pure Word, it was not our parents who preserved the Word, nor was it our parents who saved us, "but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

II. Only the Bread of Life can feed the hungry soul.

Therefore "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." While no man can labor, work, or earn his way into heaven, Christ Himself is that meat who did all the labor Himself. He suffered, died, and was buried, but He rose again the third day. God the Father sealed Christ for that very purpose, namely He chose Him, elected Him, ordained Him for the sacred task of redeeming all mankind. I John 4:14 says, "The Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world." Luther explained, "[By] the Son of Man, therewith He indicates clearly and publicly that God the Father has a Son whom they can see before their eyes, take hold of, hear, and feel." Thus all who believe in Him would receive and inherit everlasting life.

"This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." Note in this passage faith itself is a WORK of God, but God through this gift is convincing us to believe, for if we do not believe we

cannot be saved. Hence the Bible says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but He that believeth not shall be damned." Jesus likewise said, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Thus it is true, and we dare not apologize for it: Christ alone is the only door to heaven, the only Bread of Life one can eat to be saved. "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me." The god of the Jews, Mormons, J.W.'s, Muslims cannot save anyone, because these gods do not exist. They exist only in the minds of man, and they all teach what the devil has always taught, that man must earn heaven by good works. But directly contrary to this Jesus said, "My Father GIVETH you the true bread from heaven, for the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and GIVETH life unto the world." There is therefore accordingly through Christ true, spiritual, and everlasting life, because He by His body earned for us the forgiveness of sins on the cross. Correspondingly without Christ there is no true, spiritual, or everlasting life, because those in unbelief are still dead without forgiveness by faith in Christ. Having no faith in Christ they do not possess Christ's forgiveness by faith. Thus Christ teaches in the Bible, all men should sincerely turn away from their sins and confess their sins to Christ whose arms of forgiveness are open. Lord evermore give us this bread! To this plea of the broken sinner, Jesus happily declares, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

Finally beloved of the Lord, God's forgiveness of sins through Christ the Bread of Life is without limit, abundant, and overflowing. "Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound." Isaiah writes His forgiveness is "without money, without price." To those who thirst to be forgiven Jesus says, "Let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Amen.