

“Jesus-The Living Bread”

John 6: 41-51

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Text: John 6:41-51 (NIV) ⁴¹ At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" ⁴³ "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. ⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

We read that the **“Jews began to grumble about him.”** That may not be surprising but later on in this passage is something that may actually be quite shocking. We read these words:

John 6:66 (NIV) “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”

So, as we begin another year of ministry, we come back quite appropriately to the question of discipleship...and we discover from this portion of the Word of God that disciples...***can turn back!*** Disciples can choose to no longer follow Jesus! This begs the question “Can the Christian fall away? Can the Christian truly fully and finally lose their salvation?” No. But from this text we learn that ***disciples*** can fall away! Let us remember that a disciple is a “student.” Indeed, the Greek New Testament word is “matha-tais” meaning “student” ...one who learns from a teacher. So, here is a great Biblical truth: “All Christians are disciples...but all disciples are not necessarily Christians.” Before proceeding, let us pray.

Louis Zamperini grew up in a modest family in California the 1930’s. As a teenager, he was rebellious and mischievous in the extreme. A practical joker and a daredevil, Louis was well on his way to a life of conflict with the law until he discovered running. Before long, he was not only a local champion on his high school track team but he was winning in metes against college and even Olympic athletes. Later at USC, he broke every conceivable college record and went on to compete in the 1936 Olympics in Germany. There his performance was so amazing that Hitler himself insisted on meeting him! Louis was on top of the world when his life plans changed. World War

Two broke out. After enlisting in the Army Air Corps, Louis served as a Lieutenant and a bombardier on a B-24.

Having flown dozens of missions, Louis and his crew ran out of luck when their plane crashed in the Pacific on May 27, 1943. Eight of the crew were killed; three survived...Louis among them. For weeks they floated in a shark-filled ocean. With no food and the only water available coming from an occasional rain, one man died. Japanese planes shot at them from on high. They ate the carcasses of dead birds they were able to gather. They were way past the point of starvation...delirious from thirst and emaciated...they regularly hallucinated about food. They were near death hanging on unable to lift their heads when finally, after 47 days in the open sea, they were rescued...by the Japanese.

For two years Louis was held in a prison camp living on hands full of rice and the rotting meat from dogs and rats. The prisoners never received the Red Cross food that was sent their way. The guards ate it and let the captives forage for themselves. They ate wood and bugs and grass. Louis' body weight went from his Olympic training days of a hundred and sixty pounds down to less than eighty. He was near death for months...literally starving. He was beaten daily sometimes two or three times. Many other men died but somehow Louis held on. If ever there was a living dead man, it was Louie. He would have given everything he had ever owned or valued for a loaf of bread. What became of Louis Zamperini? I'll tell you...in a little while.

For thousands of years, men have made bread. For thousands of years men have worked vines and nurtured the grapes to make wine. The ancient Jews of Jesus' day had been taught from their earliest years that God had sent manna into the wilderness to feed them. With Moses leading the way, they escaped from Egypt certain each day that bread would be supplied in the morning. They knew that water would flow when they needed it and that even wine would come their way as God provided. They were a people who loved what their Scriptures said. They knew the Psalm that reminded them:

Psalms 105:40 (NIV) ⁴⁰ They asked, and he brought them quail and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.

These Jews believed that God loved them and was pleased to provide for them! Another Psalmist wrote that God had provided:

Psalms 104:15 (NIV) ¹⁵ wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.

But even with wine, and bread and oil they were starving and sickly...in their souls. By the time they gathered to hear a lesson from Jesus on a dusty afternoon, they were nearly in a state of spiritual starvation! The great difference between spiritual starvation and literal starvation is that a man who has not eaten for weeks feels the pangs of starvation. His stomach twists and his coordination becomes unsteady. And eventually the sense of hunger leaves him yet he can feel that he is dying. But the man who starving spiritually feels no symptoms, unless a miracle takes place. More on that later. He fills himself with the things of the world and if ever for a moment he feels that hunger or thirst to know the God who made him...he immediately satisfies his longings with more things or more travel or more excitement or more passion or more

of the stuff of life that he can feel and touch and taste and see. But inside he is starving.

This was the case of the men that day with Jesus. They had been fed for sure...but their souls were starving to death. Actually, they were like Louis Zamperini. When the war finally ended, he found his way home after many months of hospitalization. All he wanted to do was eat and rest and eat some more. But he could barely sleep. His dreams were haunted by a prison guard they had called "The Bird." He was safe at home, yet that man stood over him every night big as life and kicked him and punched him over and over. Louis began to drink. He got married but his marriage was soon a nightmare itself with his wife finally leaving him because of his drunkenness. Louis was physically fit again and had gained back all the lost weight...but his soul was starving to death...filled with hatred and fantasies of returning to Japan to find the guards who had tortured him. He was consumed by rage and his soul was starving.

It may seem like a great stretch to say that Jesus was dealing with men so very darkened. But we must remember that many of those who initially followed Jesus were the sons of those who had murdered the prophets. And when we hear the word "disciple" we quickly think of spiritual men and spiritual women humbly following Jesus...but not all disciples were and are true believers. The same is true today. Many of these disciples were spiritually starving. And now Jesus confronts them in a most unexpected way...

Some people say Jesus was only gentle. They say that Jesus was always meek and mild and non-controversial. But those folks need to re-read the New Testament. You don't get crucified for not offending! You don't get crucified for not disturbing! You don't get crucified for being non-controversial! In fact, Jesus was so incredibly controversial that many of his disciples...his students....decided to go find another teacher! Like golfers who change coaches or vocalists who sign on with a different teacher, they no longer wanted his guidance. They turned their backs on him and walked away. Why? Because Jesus was speaking to their souls and they could not hear what he was saying!

Was this any way to build a following? Was this any way to build a church? Or could it be that Jesus was not trying to gain a following but rather simply carry out the assignment that he had from his Father in Heaven? To gather up those who had been given to him to save? To gather up those who were spiritually starving and who, by the grace of God, knew it? Jesus knew that when most people finally heard what he was saying...they would turn away. Controversy was something Jesus fully expected. After all, coming among other people who could only see him as a man...a human being...coming among them and saying things like this:

⁵¹ "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Saying such things was astounding! The Jews in the crowd following Jesus would be shocked! Floored! All they heard at this moment...was cannibalism! As Jews, they would have known that Leviticus expressly forbade such things. We read:

Leviticus 17:10 (ESV) ¹⁰ “If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.”

It’s almost as if Jesus is trying to shock them. And as if the idea of breaking the Levitical Law was not offensive enough, Jesus seems to speak dismissively about Moses himself a few verses later. He says:

John 6:57-58 (NIV) ⁵⁷ “Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”

These statements were deal-breakers! Unless a person knew they were spiritually starving, such statements would convince them that Jesus was out of his mind! In fact, these statements have possibly caused more controversy in the history of the church than any other assertions in the Bible! Proving that Jesus had alienated his hearers even before he said he was the Christ! We may think that our current debates about creation and about Israel and about the end times and other things are the most heated issues ever raised but these assertions exceeded them all. All those who heard it were not only stunned but they knew not what to make of such things! “Living bread?” “My flesh is real food?” The disciples began to mutter and grumble and divisions started to break out between them. Divisions that remain to this day. I’m convinced that Jesus was speaking figuratively and was being misunderstood as so often happened in the Gospel of John. But other Christians believe differently.

The Church of Rome roots its Doctrine of Transubstantiation in part...in this passage. This Doctrine separates Catholics and Protestants in the deepest way. And it all turns on the literal and figurative issue. Because Jesus said:

John 6:55-56 (NIV) ⁵⁵ “For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.”

“Transubstantiation” says that upon the prayer of a Priest, the bread and wine are changed into the literal body and blood of Jesus. The Catholic Church pronounced this Doctrine in the year 1215 and later re-affirmed it in the 1500’s. Protestants and Catholics look at the Communion Supper differently but both groups accept Jesus’ Lordship and that he is the Son of God. But many did not that day and many do not today. Why not? Listen closely please that God’s grace may be made clear to all of us this day...

⁴² They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

They are so spiritually dull that they cannot get past the literal truth. They are thinking that the words of Jesus are bizarre and that, in any case, he cannot be the Christ from Heaven. They do not believe that he is the living bread. But... some do. *We do*. Why? What is the difference between those who reject Christ and those who receive him and believe that he is the living bread? The answer is that we believe because we were

chosen by God from eternity to believe and He has graciously determined to include us in his flock! Listen closely...

⁴³ “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. ⁴⁴ “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

So next Jesus says to those who had not walked away...

⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

As Jonah had said centuries before, when he was rescued from drowning, “Salvation is from the Lord.”

One night, after Louis’ wife had left him, she went to a Billy Graham rally in Los Angeles. There she heard the Gospel clearly for the first time and she went forward and was saved. The next day, she moved back in with Louis and told him that she was not going to divorce him. She had experienced Christ...the living bread. He dismissed her testimony...of course. He continued to drink. One night, he finally agreed to go and hear the great evangelist. When it came time for an altar call, he stormed out...muttering like the men in our passage. A few days later, he reluctantly agreed to go again. Once more Mr. Graham finished his sermon and Louis stood to leave. But there at the top of the aisle hearing the call to come finally and fully to Christ, Louis remembered a moment from years before....when he was trying to hide in the water next to his raft...a moment when Japanese Zeros were splintering the ocean with hundreds of screaming bullets how he had prayed that he would give his life to the Lord if he would save him. Three or four times the planes circled around and bore down on them. Yet not one bullet hit Louis or his friend in the raft. They survived.

Louis slowly turned and went down the stairs towards Mr. Graham and knelt and received Christ. And that night, for the first time in years, he slept peacefully without any dreams of the man who had tortured him. A year later, Louis went to Japan to try to meet the man who had so brutalized him. He wanted to tell him he forgave him and to tell him about Jesus. But the man refused to meet him and later died in bitterness. Louis went on to start a ministry to troubled youth and to serve the Lord with the rest of his life. He had fed upon Christ the living bread.

Today, Louis is 94 years old and still serving the Lord in California. Still feeding on the living bread that is Christ! Still telling others how the Lord Jesus kept him alive and fed his soul and delivered him from death as a prisoner of the Japanese and later a prisoner of sin. For Jesus said:

⁵¹ “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Let us pray.

