

# THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN

by Ray C. Stedman

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John 6 follows the miracles of Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 and walking on the water. A crowd has followed Jesus to the other side of the lake and now he discourses on the bread of life:

**"Do not work for the food that spoils [or perishes], but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." {John 6:27 NIV}**

That almost sounds as though the Lord is saying "Don't bother to go to work. Don't bother to earn any money for food, it's not worth it." But, of course, he is not saying that, because in many other places he indicates that God has given us the ability to work and labor, and this is the way he supplies our needs. He knows we need food and shelter and clothing and other things -- the *Sermon on the Mount* reflects that. But here our Lord is saying "Don't just work for food. Realize that while you are working for food, God can be at work with you. That is the work that changes the world. It changes you, and it changes the world. Your very labor to earn food also can be the time when God is working. Let that be your goal, not earning money to buy food."

Look at the response in verse 28:

**Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the work of God?" {John 6:28 NIV}**

Surely that is a hunger that lies at the bottom of every heart. "What can we do to do the works of God?" Everybody wants power. We want to be able to relate to God and to do what he wants done in this world. We sense that this is fulfillment, this is power, this is effectiveness, this is the meaning of life. So these people, sensing this, said to him, "What must we do to do the works of God?" Jesus' reply is very significant.

**He said, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one whom he has sent." {John 6:29 NIV}**

The word "believe" does not refer to a single act. It doesn't mean to believe once, and become a Christian; it is in the continuous present tense, so it means "to keep on believing in the one that he sent." For that one is able to work through you. What Jesus is really saying here is that no man can do God's work. Only God can do God's work. If you want God's work done, it takes God to do it. The joy of the Christian life is that, through your faith in Christ, he provides God to do his work while you are working -- whether you are working at your house, or shop, or school, or office.

What is the work of God? If you asked that question today, many people would say, "Well, it is to do miracles. God is a miracle-working God." This viewpoint is stressed today. God works miracles. Jesus worked miracles. He healed the sick, he raised the dead, he opened the eyes of the blind; that is the work of God. Well, that was the work of God -- there is no question about it. But that is not what our Lord is referring to here, because, as he makes clear, this is not something that men can do. The work of God is not to go around doing startling miracles for people to see. That is what people today think miracles are. But miracles are something that other power can effect within us, too. Scripture warns that the devil and his angels are able to do miracles. So miracles alone never constitute a sign of God at work.

Then what is the work of God? The work of God is to change people. That is what God is here for. That is what he sent the Lord for -- to change people. God's work is to take an impatient aggressive businessman who is out only to make money for his own purposes and to advance his own style of living, and change him into a compassionate, patient man who learns how to think of others and to work for their good as well as his own.

Now that takes power. The work of God is to take a shrewish, mean-tempered woman who yells at her kids and screams at her husband, and turn her into a patient, loving wife who learns how to handle her husband and family in love. That is the work of God.

Do you know that the nations of this earth have been laboring for centuries to find a power that can do those simple things? No power has been found that can do these things. All our vast, expensive educational systems cannot do them. We have ample testimony to that, haven't we? But God, at work in a human being, can change him, make him new and fresh and different, and help him to act in ways that ordinarily he would not act. That is the work of God.

In Verse 30, these people asked another question:

**So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" {John 6:30 RSV}**

"You tell us you are going to do this; all right, then give us a sign. We want a miracle." They had just had a miracle. It is amazing to me that they would ask for a sign just after the feeding of the five thousand, but the desire for miracles is insatiable. The people asked for a sign, and they gave the Lord a little hint of what kind of sign they would like.

**"Our forefathers ate manna in the desert;" {John 6:31a NIV}**

"Aha! You claim you are greater than Moses, but Moses fed us in the wilderness. What sign do you give?" This is almost incredible. After Jesus had fed the five thousand, this is what they asked for. Jesus replied, "Well, you are wrong. You are wrong in two ways.

- "First, it wasn't Moses who gave you the manna in the wilderness, it was God. Moses was just a man. He was an instrument of God, but it was God who gave you the manna in the wilderness, not Moses.
- "Second, you are wrong in that you think what you need is manna. That is not what you need. What you need is me. You need my life in you. And if you understood that, then you would realize that your efforts to earn a living can be the platform from which you are available as an instrument to do the work of God."

God's work is not something you just do here at church; it is something you do throughout the week. That is when God is interested in you doing the work of God.

To do God's work you must learn this great fact that Jesus states very clearly in Verse 53:

**Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." {John 6:53 NIV}**

That sounds like he is turning us all into cannibals, doesn't it? Eat flesh, drink blood. But that is why we have a communion service. We do not do this because, as some people think, the bread and wine are turned into the flesh and blood of Jesus. They are not turned into anything. They remain bread and grape juice, or wine. But they are symbols of the fact Jesus states here. If you do not eat his flesh and drink his blood -- all week long -- you have no life in you. God is not at work in you.

How do you eat his flesh and drink his blood?

In Verse 35, he explains what he means by "eat" and "drink":

**Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." {John 6:35 NIV}**

When are you not hungry? When you have eaten, right? That is really the only time when you are not hungry.

Most people are a little bit hungry about an hour after they have eaten and start raiding the refrigerator. So hunger returns pretty fast. But when you have just gotten up from a full meal, you are no longer hungry. Jesus says, "He who comes to me will no longer be hungry," therefore, he who has come to Jesus has eaten. And "he who believes in me will never be thirsty." When are you not thirsty? When you have just drunk. Therefore, he says, "He who believes in me has already drunk of me." This is what "eat" and "drink" mean -- come and believe. This is what the symbol of eating and drinking means: Come to me, think about me, realize that I am with you and I am able to work in you and through you and change your attitude right where you are. Then believe on me, change it, do it, and I'll be there to make it work."

This is the most radical principle ever released among men! This is what Christianity is all about. It will change your life. Start living that way -- not just here at church, but all through the week, at home, wherever you are. You will be a different person as you learn this principle. Come and believe, come and believe -- all week long.

Confronted with any demand, instead of reacting according to the way you feel, act according to the way he says, and show love, patience, forgiveness, understanding, and tenderness -- whatever the need may be -- on the basis that he is ready to work through you and make it work. See how Jesus puts that in Verse 57:

**"Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father [Jesus was eating and drinking the Father all the time], so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."  
{John 6:57 NIV}**

You and I, eating and drinking him, coming and believing in him all the time, will live because of him.

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