

Passage: John 6:24-35 (prepared 7/26/09; preached 8/2/09)

25 **When they found him**¹ on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

26 Jesus **answered**², “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because **you ate the loaves and had your fill**³.”

27 Do not **work**^{4,5,6} for food that spoils, 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**⁷ of approval.”

28 Then they asked him, “**What must we do**^{8,9} to do the works God requires?”

29 Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

30 So they asked him, “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? **What will you do?**¹⁰”

31 Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them **bread**¹¹ **from heaven**¹² to eat.’”

32 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is **not Moses**¹³ who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

34 “Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”

35 Then Jesus declared, “**I am the bread of life**¹⁴. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

¹ The statement serves as an indirect confirmation of the sign of the crossing of the lake; the crowd knew that one boat only was at the place where the disciples had embarked and that Jesus did not go with them; hence, they were perplexed as to what had happened to Jesus. This “crowd,” of course, is not to be identified with the entire multitude that had been present at the feeding miracle; it was not an armada that crossed the Lake to find Jesus! WBC

² Jesus was not flattered by the attention of the crowds, but immediately he began his instruction. ExpBC

³ The reply of Jesus to the question of those who sought him is brusque: they had searched for him, not because they “saw signs” but because they had full bellies and wanted more. Having failed to see the meaning of the feeding miracle, they had simply been mystified by the disappearance of Jesus WBC

⁴ This parallels his words to the Samaritan woman concerning the “living water” that did not come from the well. Like the Samaritan woman, the people could not lift their minds above the physical necessities of life. Jesus was not commanding them to stop working for a living, but he was saying that their main quest should not be for food that readily perishes. The “food that endures to eternal life” is himself, as the later mystical utterance in v. 54 states ExpBC

⁵ The dialogue between Jesus and the crowd plays on the term work; Judaism stressed righteous works, but Jesus singles out one work: faith in him (Jewish teachers praised Abraham’s “work” of faith in God, but Jesus’ demand is more specific). They then demand from Jesus a “work,” which now means a sign (v. 30), as it sometimes does in Jewish literature. IVPBBC

⁶ The “work” of which Jesus speaks is of a spiritual kind that can receive the spiritual bread. This the Son of Man alone can give, since God has “set his seal on him,” i.e., as the Mediator of the kingdom of redemption. the “work” God wants is faith in the one whom God has sent. WBC

⁷ The seal is God’s mark of authentication. Whoever holds the seal acts on God’s behalf. Hence the importance of Jesus as God’s agent, who is here called the Son of Man, a title which draws attention to his humanity. NBC

⁸ To Jewish questioners, obtaining eternal life consisted in finding the right formula for performing works to please God. (ExpBC)

⁹ They were convinced of their ability to meet what was required, but Jesus had to remind them that eternal life is a gift. NBC

¹⁰ Their response to this affirmation is nothing less than a challenge. They were attempting to evaluate him by the ministry of Moses, who had provided manna for their forefathers in the wilderness. Their concept of sign seems to have been limited to a reproduction of the desert experience of the Israelites. This was tantamount to expecting that the Messiah must outdo Moses to impress them.: “What are you ‘working’ to warrant such belief? What accrediting sign have you to show that you are from God?” Their citing of the Scripture that speaks of God giving Israel “bread from heaven” (Exod 16:15, modified by Neh 9:15 and Ps 78:24) presupposes the current teaching that the Messiah, the “second Redeemer” (after Moses, the first Redeemer), will at his coming restore the manna to Israel (so MidrQoh 1:9, “As the first Redeemer brought down the manna ... so will also the last Redeemer cause the manna to come down”). The implication is plain: if Jesus be God’s deliverer, let him perform that sign! WBC

¹¹ Bread and Life. Bread, which in the Bible often stands for all food, is a symbol for the Word of God, and by extension, for the covenant relationship it governs and the life that flows from the covenant. In the Lord’s name, Isaiah appeals to Israel to “eat what is good,” the true bread of the “everlasting covenant” (Isa. 55:2–3). Moses compared the Word of the Lord to bread as the true basis for life in the covenant (Deut. 8:3); his words are quoted by Jesus in resisting the tempter (Matt. 4:4). In speaking of bread, Moses was referring to the manna that fell during Israel’s wanderings, by which the people were miraculously fed in a barren wilderness. Jesus also mentions the manna, contrasting it with himself as the “Bread of Life,” or living bread (John 6:49–51). This discourse of Jesus is filled with overlapping symbols: the manna is a token of the “true bread out of heaven,” yet the bread represents Jesus’ flesh, which he gives in dying that the world might live (John 6:32–33, 51). The discourse is occasioned by the feeding of the multitude, in which Jesus “gave thanks”; John pointedly records this twice (John 6:11, 23), suggesting that the entire chapter is an interpretation of the Eucharist. (Mention of the impending Passover celebration in the introduction to the account [John 6:4] reinforces this hypothesis.) Yet, in the end, it is neither the manna, nor the bread, nor his flesh, nor any ceremonial act that Jesus has in mind, but a spiritual reality symbols can only suggest: “the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). (Webber)

¹² the characterization of the bread-manna as “from heaven” is significant; Jesus, in the view of the questioners, had given mere bread in the wilderness (or so people said). “Let the manna from heaven rain down again upon us” reminds of the request of Pharisees, recorded at this point in Mark 8:11, for a sign “from heaven.” they were not satisfied with an act that could be inspired “from below,” i.e. by Beelzebub (cf. Mark 3:22); they wanted a demonstration that was clearly “from heaven,” i.e., from God. WBC

¹³ (i) Contrary to contemporary assumptions, the bread from heaven was given not by Moses but by the Father (note the language of the Midrash: “As the first Redeemer brought down the manna ... so will the last Redeemer....”). (ii) The Father gives the true bread from heaven, and he gives it now. (iii) This bread of God is “that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world,” i.e., it gives the life of the age to come, the kingdom of God. WBC

¹⁴ This is the first of the seven $\square\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ sayings with a predicate in the Gospel. Jesus is the Bread which gives and sustains “life,” the life of the kingdom of God. This he bestows on those who “come” to him and who “believe” in him—the synonymous parallelism is unmistakable. One who so “comes” and “believes” will “never hunger” and “never, never thirst” WBC Jesus had already startled the people by saying that Moses did not give them real bread from heaven. Now he shocked them a second time by announcing that he was the bread the Father had given. Jesus claimed to be the only permanent satisfaction for the human desire for life. The attainment of this satisfaction hinges on belief. The definition of this term varies between the people’s use of it (v. 30) and Jesus’ (v. 35). To them “belief” meant acceptance of his competence on the basis of miracles; to him it meant commitment, not finally on the basis of the miracles, but on trust in his person. The assertion “I am the bread of life” is the first in a series of such declarations that are peculiar to this Gospel (8:12; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). Each represents a particular relationship of Jesus to the spiritual needs of men: their light in darkness, their entrance into security and fellowship, their guide and protector in life, their hope in death, their certainty in perplexity, and their source of vitality for productiveness. He desired that men should receive him, not simply for what he might give them, but for what he might be to them. The use of the definite article “the” in “the life” (tes zoes) is definitive and restrictive. Jesus was talking about “the” bread that gives eternal life; but this was beyond their comprehension, just as the miracles Jesus had performed in their sight did not lead them to believe in him.